HAUNTED HARBOUR

BY

PERCY F. WESTERMAN

Illustrated by John de Walton

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By Percy F. Westerman

Haunted Harbour.
His Unfinished Voyage.
Midshipman Webb's Treasure
Winged Might.
Captain Flick.
Tireless Wings.
His First Ship.
The Red Pirate.
The Call of the Sea.
Standish of the Air Police.
Sleuths of the Air.
Andy-All-Alone.
The Westow Talisman.
The White Arab.
The Buccaneers of Boya.
Rounding up the Raider.
Captain Fosdyke's Gold.
In Defiance of the Ban.
The Senior Cadet.
The Amir's Ruby.
The Secret of the Plateau.
Leslie Dexter, Cadet.
All Hands to the Boats.
A Mystery of the Broads.
Rivals of the Reef.
Captain Starlight.
On the Wings of the Wind.
Captain Blundell's Treasure.
The Third Officer.
Unconquered Wings.
Pat Stobart in the "Golden Dawn".
Ringed by Fire.
Midshipman Raxworthy.
Chums of the "Golden Vanity".
Clipped Wings.
Rocks Ahead.
King for a Month.
The Disappearing Dhow.
The Luck of the "Golden Dawn".
The Salving of the "Fusi Yama".
Winning his Wings.
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The Wireless Officer.
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The Thick of the Fray at Zeebrugge.
With Beatty off Jutland.
The Dispatch Riders.
A Cadet of the Mercantile Marine.
With the Last of the Buccaneers.
A Lively Bit of the Front.
The Westerman Omnibus Book

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HAUNTED HARBOUR

CHAPTER I

"By Midnight on Friday"

"Now, what's your report?"

Tom Redpole, usually known as The Ferret, glanced apprehensively at the partly-opened skylight.

"Anyone on deck?"

"It wouldn't much matter if there were," replied Michael Apulgrab, his employer. "They are all in this, more or less. As a matter of fact, everyone's for'ard. Well?"

"So far there's not much to complain about. We've got most of the stuff stowed under the old mill. I reckon another five hundred rifles and ten thousand rounds of ammunition will complete the contract. Who's supplying the stuff, sir?"

"That's not your business. Your job is to receive the goods and see that they are delivered on board here."

"I'm doing my best."

"So I trust," rejoined Apulgrab drily.

"Yes, but——"

"But what?"

"There looks like a spot of bother ahead."

"If there is, trust you for finding it. Get it off your chest, man! Local inhabitants giving trouble?"

"No, sir, it's those Sea Scouts."

"Sea Scouts?" echoed Apulgrab sharply. "I didn't know there were any about here. Meddlesome brats, always poking their noses into other people's business. Why didn't you mention it before we decided upon Haunted Harbour?"

"'Cause they weren't there then," explained The Ferret moodily. "They aren't here now, but they will be by to-morrow. They're camping just across the creek and bringing several boats with them!"

"Confound them!" ejaculated *Katharina's* owner explosively. "Look here, Redpole: can't you boom 'em off? Couldn't you offer them a fiver or even a tenner to camp somewhere else?"

"Not much use trying that, sir. They're dead set on the place. They've been camping here every August for three years past."

"So, of course, they know every inch of the coast?"

"May be—may be not."

"Jolly awkward. Look here; use your brains. How about making things so unpleasant that they'll pack up and go somewhere else?"

"We'd be up against the local inhabitants if we tried that," objected The Ferret. "It seems strange to me how the people hereabouts like to have their Sea Scouts camping near Haunted Harbour. Even the crowd we've roped in—and they're a pretty tough lot, I give you my word—would turn out nasty if I tried to shift those lads."

"Not by physical means. I never suggested that. Can't you devise some plan?"

Redpole scratched his head, and thought for a few moments.

"I've thought of something, sir. It might work; it might not."

"Well, what is it?"

"Pitch 'em a yarn about Haunted Harbour that'll make their blood run cold. Give 'em the creeps, so to speak, so as they daren't show their faces outside their pitch after dark."

"I don't think much of that," remarked Apulgrab bluntly.

"It's enough to bank upon, anyway," declared The Ferret, bridling at the thought that his imaginative powers had been adversely criticized. "These Anglesey folk believe in the legend of Haunted Harbour—leastways most of them in these parts—and you won't get man, woman or child passing near to Deadman's Mill after dark unless it's mighty necessary. The yarn goes like this——"

"Another time, Redpole," interrupted his employer. "Provided it serves its purpose to scare these Sea Scouts stiff, that's all that matters. Now there's another thing."

"More of 'em, sir?"

"Yes, and most important. If I—we, I mean—bring this off it will be worth twenty times the profit on the cargo we are about to run. And, so far as I can see, there's much less risk."

The Ferret pricked up his ears.

"Go on, sir," he prompted eagerly.

"Seen anything in the papers about Ambrose Lartnec's offer to the British Government?"

"Oh, that!" Redpole's tone was distinctly contemptuous. "Think there's anything in that? A blinking Canadian millionaire with a bee in his bonnet."

"He's backed his convictions to the tune of a million dollars—roughly two hundred and fifty thousand pounds—which he has already paid into the Treasury," declared Apulgrab. "Most of us have some sort of kink, but when a hard-headed Canadian business man parts with that sum you can take it from me there's more than a million dollars at stake."

"Perhaps you're right, sir."

"Aren't I always right—or nearly so?"

"You've pulled most things off, I'll admit," conceded Redpole.

"And with reasonable luck we'll pull this off. I'm looking for your co-operation, and I know you'll not fail me."

"Never have yet, touch wood," rejoined The Ferret complacently. "Fire away, sir."

"Lartnec's sending to the British Government a secret device. What, exactly, I don't know, but I have good reasons for thinking that it is something of the nature of a death-ray apparatus. He claims that its use will ensure universal peace, presumably on the assumption that no country will dare go to war with the certain risk of virtual annihilation. The actual instrument, I have been given to understand, is so compact that it can be enclosed in a flat metal container not much larger than a cigarette case. Lartnec has constructed only one apparatus and that he is sending to the Admiralty for practical tests. I mean to get hold of that apparatus."

" You're aiming high this time, sir."

" I am."

" And when you've got hold of it?"

" I'm disposing of it."

" To a foreign government?"

" That's my business."

The Ferret kept silent. Experience had taught him that his employer was communicative only up to a certain point. Beyond that it was decidedly unhealthy to press for information.

All he knew was that Michael Apulgrab was the head of an organization engaged in an illegal traffic in arms. Whence these arms came or where they were ultimately disposed of, he was in utter ignorance. His task was to organize that section of the gang operating in the neighbourhood of Haunted Harbour. At stated intervals the *Katharina*, Apulgrab's steam yacht, would put into the bay. Boats under cover of darkness would put out, laden with illicit cargoes, and by dawn the *Katharina* would either have steamed seaward or would be quietly riding at anchor like one of hundreds of pleasure craft around the coasts of the British Isles.

Concerning his employer Redpole knew little—not even his nationality. Quite possibly Apulgrab could not have truthfully supplied that information. Nor was he aware how the owner of the *Katharina* spent his time between his periodical visits to the north coast of Anglesey and Haunted Harbour.

Obviously Apulgrab had plenty of money at his disposal. Apart from wages and bonuses paid to his employees ashore—although he carefully avoided direct dealings with them—the cost of running the steam yacht was considerable.

The *Katharina* was, in more respects than one, a mystery craft. Her officers and crew knew the hazardous nature of their enterprise, but even they were unaware of certain gadgets hidden in some of the subdivisions of her hold, to which Apulgrab alone had access. Even an experienced Customs officer might " rummage " the yacht without being able to discover the well-contrived secret recesses in which quantities of arms and ammunition had been and would be stowed for subsequent distribution in certain parts of the globe while wars and rumours of war made them greatly in demand.

" What about this Canadian millionaire's stunt?" asked The Ferret after a pause.

He was now on firmer ground—asking a question that had a direct bearing upon his employer's interests.

" Up to date, the situation is this," replied Apulgrab. " The secret device is on its way across the Atlantic in a liner that is due to berth at Liverpool next Friday. The sealed case will not reach Liverpool."

" Have you arranged to gain possession of it on the High Seas, sir?" asked Redpole.

Apulgrab shook his head.

" I may be enterprising, but I take no unnecessary risks," he replied. " Piracy in these days of wireless would be the work of a madman and doomed to failure from the beginning. The liner is to be met somewhere in the Irish Sea by a British destroyer. The secret device is to be transferred to the latter and taken to Holyhead. There the destroyer will be met by two Admiralty officials, who will convey their precious charge to London by car. That car will have to travel across Anglesey. I am looking to you to gain possession of that metal case before the car reaches the Menai Bridge. More than that, I expect you to deliver it to me here on board in the quickest possible time. Is that clear?"

The Ferret moistened his lips.

" Bit of a tall order, what?" he observed. " You want me to wreck the car, lay the two blokes out, and make a getaway with the metal case?"

" I'm leaving details to you, Redpole," said his employer coldly. " Only remember: a true craftsman rarely has occasion to take human life in carrying out his plans. That's all, I think. The *Katharina* will drop anchor again off Haunted Harbour at midnight on Friday. I shall expect both the cargo and Ambrose Lartnec's secret device to be on board before dawn."

CHAPTER II

On Secret Service

The Deputy Assistant Commissioner, seated at the head of a table in one of the rooms of New Scotland Yard, was silently taking stock of his four subordinates.

There had been a lull in the discussion. Suggestions had been put forward, but no real progress appeared to have been made.

He had no cause for complaint against any of these four alert, youthful-looking men. They knew their job from A to Z; but there were times when they drew blank. This was one of them.

For some months past The Yard had been in possession of certain information concerning the illegal export of arms and munitions from Great Britain. The ambassador of a certain foreign power had strongly protested. He was definitely sure that there was a prospect of the outbreak of hostilities.

Questions on the matter had been asked in the House. The Foreign Secretary had to admit that there were evidences of an illegal traffic in arms, but was unable to give any information concerning the source of manufacture or the port from which these goods were shipped abroad. He declared that he had put all the powers at his disposal into operation with a view to tracing the principal or the agents engaged upon this work, which was a direct and flagrant breach of the law.

It was upon this business that the Deputy Assistant Commissioner of New Scotland Yard had summoned a meeting of certain of his subordinates.

"This sort of thing must stop," he declared. "We know there is a traffic in arms in progress, but so far we are at a loss to place our fingers upon any definite locality. We can, however, rule out the big ports. It is the small, unfrequented harbours that may—and must—prove to be fruitful ground. Remember, it is a difficult task. The Customs officials are most efficient in preventing smuggled goods entering the country; but when it comes to a question of checking every article exported from every little seaport—or even when taken off from a desolate part of the coast—their activities must necessarily be restricted.

"I have therefore decided to comb out certain districts where facilities might exist for this business. The responsibility will be mine; the kudos which I hope will fall to the luck or good judgment of one or more of you, will be yours. Now look at the map."

With the aid of one of his colleagues, he unrolled a large coloured map of the British Isles. It occupied the greater part of the table-top.

"You, Symonds, I am sending to the Dorset coast. There you may possibly find scope for your activities. Glegson, I think Cornwall will provide you with sufficient material to keep you busy for at least a month. You, Bonner, will take the Norfolk and Lincolnshire coasts; might I call your attention to the fact that King John lost most of his treasure in The Wash. Perhaps you might find yours there. And, finally, you, Mills, will cast your net in Anglesey. I don't mind admitting that I have no definite grounds for allocating you to this district. Do you know Anglesey at all?"

Courtney Mills, the youngest of the four, shook his head.

" No, sir," he replied, " I've never been to Wales."

" Then now is your opportunity to repair an omission. You'd better adopt the rôle of a tourist. You'll find the natives most hospitable—up to a point. If you succeed in probing beneath the surface—and it will be difficult to do so without arousing fierce suspicion—you may find that your efforts have not been in vain."

At the end of the conference the D.A.C. called Mills aside.

" You might direct particular attention to Haunted Harbour, Mills."

" Haunted Harbour, sir? Remarkable name! Have you received any information?"

" None whatever. Somehow, the name of the place suggests possibilities. I may be wrong; so if you draw blank you have my permission to chuck your disappointment in my teeth."

The Deputy Assistant Commissioner smiled whimsically. He was one of those men who, having authority, had the gift of treating his subordinates as human beings and not merely as cogs in the official machine.

"Haunted Harbour," reiterated Courtney thoughtfully. "Why that name, sir?"

"Can't say. Never went to the length of making inquiries, but I can give you some particulars of the place. A hundred years ago it was a thriving seaport with about five thousand inhabitants. To-day most of the buildings are in ruins and the harbour works almost derelict; the reason being that the once-extensive copper mines have been worked out and abandoned. Amongst that warren of ruins there are ample opportunities for smugglers and gun-runners to go about their unlawful business; so, perhaps, after all, your journey there will not be in vain. You had better leave here the day after to-morrow. That will give you time to make preparations and read up the *dossiers* of the few Anglesey suspects and convicted persons whose records and finger-prints we already possess."

Business detained Courtney Mills at The Yard until after seven o'clock. Then he made his way to Fenchurch Street, to train to his home. The rush hour was over, so that he was able to find a carriage with only two people already in possession.

One he knew slightly. Courtney nodded to him and, taking the opposite corner-seat, unfolded his evening paper.

The other passenger was a well-set-up individual of medium height. His deeply-tanned features told the detective that that complexion had not been the result of merely a fresh-air life. It spoke unmistakably of the tang of salt-sea breezes.

" Mate of a merchant vessel, home on leave," was Courtney's unspoken verdict.

He was wrong, for presently, as the train drew out of the station, he could hardly restrain his astonishment when he caught the words " Haunted Harbour ".

After that he simply *had* to become an interested eavesdropper. Within a few hours of having heard his Chief mention that hitherto unknown place, the name had cropped up again. Was it pure coincidence or an instrument to further his mission to the wilds of the Isle of Anglesey.

" Rather! They are quite what one might call 'good mixers'," declared the bronzed stranger. " For instance, one of my patrol leaders, a youth named Hargreaves—you've probably met his father in the City—is more than moderately well off. Runs an expensive car and also has his own aeroplane, and yet he prefers to go to camp with the troop."

" Hargreaves—hasn't he a sister who is a bit of a flyer too?" asked Courtney's acquaintance.

" Something more than a bit. . . . And then, by way of contrast, there's his Second, a bright lad by name of Jimmy Cotton. But I don't suppose they'll interest you much."

" On the contrary, I'm always interested in Scouts, especially Sea Scouts, although I have no actual connexion with the Movement. Well, what about Jimmy Cotton, Dangerfield?"

Courtney Mills was making progress. Already he had corrected an error on his part. The stranger wasn't an officer of the Mercantile Marine, but a Scoutmaster—and a Sea Scoutmaster at that. Also his name was Dangerfield and the troop was evidently about to go to camp at Haunted Harbour.

He made a quick decision. It was characteristic of him to make up his mind rapidly but not recklessly. Rarely were his decisions at fault; if they were it was chiefly in non-essentials. In matters of moment, there was sound common sense to back up his impulses.

He must get to know this Mr. Dangerfield. But how? He could hardly ask his slight acquaintance, Barlow, to introduce him.

"Jimmy Cotton is a thoroughly good sort," continued the Scoutmaster. "Tremendously keen, and although he's as poor as the proverbial church mouse he won't accept favours from anyone. Curious sense of independence in a youth, nowadays! And yet he and young Hargreaves are great pals. That's what I meant by saying they were good mixers, and it's much the same with the whole troop."

"What's the great idea of taking them all the way to Haunted Harbour?" asked Barlow.

"This will be the third camp there. The fellows unanimously voted for it. Just the place for unrestricted sea-scouting, and plenty of scope ashore should the weather conditions make it out of the question for sea work. We're off the day after to-morrow."

Again coincidence! These Sea Scouts were going into camp at Haunted Harbour on the same day that

Courtney Mills had been ordered to proceed to the locality bearing such an awesome name.

The train drew up at the station where Courtney usually alighted. He made no effort to do so. Barlow gave him a curious glance but said nothing. After all, it was no business of his, although whenever the two men travelled by the same train they walked together for a quarter of a mile before going to their respective homes.

The Secret Service man appeared to be engrossed in his paper until the train resumed its journey. Then, apparently by accident, he dropped his cigarette case. Dangerfield leant forward to pick it up; so did Courtney. Their heads met with a slight bump. Mutual apologies followed, and then they abandoned the Englishman's customary reserve.

Courtney approached his subject adroitly, but when he led the conversation into scouting channels he knew that he had introduced a subject dear to the Scoutmaster's heart. From Scouting it was a short way to the subject of Haunted Harbour.

"I heard you mention the place to Barlow," remarked the Secret Service man. "I could not but feel interested."

"Why?" asked Dangerfield.

"Because I'm visiting that locality the day after to-morrow."

"Then might I again ask why? Visitors to that locality are few and far between. In fact we—my troop, that is—rather pride ourselves upon the fact that we have discovered a romantic district hitherto unspoiled by visitors. Not that I wish to cast aspersions upon you, Mr.——?"

"Mills—Courtney Mills," rejoined the Secret Service man by way of introduction.

Then acting upon one of his quick decisions he produced his official card.

"So you see, Mr. Dangerfield," he continued, "I'm not exactly a tripper. I'm on a special mission, the nature of which I am quite prepared to explain."

"I'd be interested," declared the S.M. "But is it necessary or desirable in the interests of Scotland Yard?"

"I think so," replied Courtney with his engaging smile. "In fact, you and your Sea Scouts may be able to render me and Scotland Yard some very material assistance."

"In what way?"

"You know the locality well. The local inhabitants know who you are and welcome you to the place, I believe?"

"That is so."

"Well, then; would it be possible and practicable for me to attach myself to your troop in some sort of official capacity? I could, of course, take the boys into my confidence over this matter if you think they will enter whole-heartedly into the business."

"Perhaps you will tell me the nature of the business, Mr. Mills?"

"Certainly."

As briefly as possible Courtney outlined the meagre facts that necessitated his forthcoming visit to Haunted

Harbour. Considering the proposition, Dangerfield decided that the matter was one into which his Sea Scouts could enter without detriment to their efficiency. In fact, they would be rendering service to their country by assisting the law.

" I think it can easily be arranged, Mr. Mills," he said. " We can make you an honorary Scoutmaster going to camp as my guest. In fact, since most of us are proceeding by rail—I'm going by road, since we're transporting one of our sailing boats—you'll be most useful in keeping an eye upon the younger ones among my decidedly high-spirited boys."

" Splendid!" ejaculated Courtney Mills.

CHAPTER III

A Belated Arrival

" Here come the others, you fellows!" shouted Jimmy Cotton, pausing in his work of driving in a tent-peg and pointing across the sunlit waters of Camlytch Bay—that shallow indentation of the north coast of Anglesey which includes the derelict Haunted Harbour, a little more than a mile from the camp site.

There were four boats well laden with lustily-singing Sea Scouts and their gear. Leading the procession was the *Gannet*, a staunch motor-boat engaged in towing the other three. The wind had fallen light, and although the crews of the towed boats could have taken to the oars, they were quite content to arrive in this fashion after an arduous day's journey by road.

" I didn't think they'd be here so soon, Jimmy," observed the honorary Scoutmaster, Mr. Courtney Mills. " They're lucky to be in before dark. They'll want grub. How are the dixies doing?"

" Nearly boiling, sir," replied the Second. " Come on, you chaps, let's go down to the beach and give them a hand. Not you two, you're cooks, you know," he added, addressing two freckled youths whose reddened eyelids and sooty features bore testimony to their prolonged and successful struggle with the cook-house fires. The fuel question at Camlytch Bay was a burning one in more senses than one. Wood was scarce and difficult to obtain, while dried kelp, bundles of gorse and a leavening of drift-wood made a sorry and sooty substitute.

Presently Cotton began to scan the approaching boats anxiously. In a lull between the exchanges of cheering he hailed the foremost craft:

" Ahoy, there! Where's Hargreaves?"

For some seconds there was no reply. It was Mr. Dangerfield who replied:

" Isn't he with you?"

" Haven't seen a sign of him, sir," replied the Second. " He wasn't at the station when we left. We all thought he had gone on with you by road."

" And I quite thought he'd gone with you fellows. Hello, Mills! What have you done with one of my patrol leaders?"

" Not guilty, me lud!" replied the Secret Service man and temporary honorary Scoutmaster. " There were eleven when we left and eleven when we arrived at Camlytch. I shouldn't have been surprised to find some of them adrift by the time we got here. So Dick Hargreaves is missing! That's a pity. I wanted to see that bright youth. I suppose he'll turn up, like a bad halfpenny."

" Let's hope so," rejoined the S.M. " An absent patrol leader makes a lot of difference to his patrol, although we've a most efficient Second."

Jimmy Cotton blushed at the genuine compliment. But his pleasure at receiving this tribute from his

Scoutmaster was marred by the knowledge that his chum Hargreaves had not turned up. The patrol leader was so keen to come to camp; unaccountably, and without a word or letter of explanation, he had failed to materialize.

What would they do without Patrol Leader Dick Hargreaves—the live wire of the troop; the one who got things done smartly and without fuss; the one who made the camp-fire sing-song go with a tremendous swing? What would the troop do without him?

The solution to that problem was simple enough. They just carried on with their respective jobs and forgot all about the absentee!

It was a strenuous evening. In spite of the fact that the Sea Scouts who had travelled to camp by rail had acted as an advance party, there still remained a lot to be done before prayers and lights-out. Stores had to be carried up from the boats, gear unloaded, kits handed to their respective owners and finally the boats themselves had to be moored.

Then the troop sat down to a really splendid supper, details of which had better be withheld lest they excite the envy of less fortunate Scouts.

" Have any of the local inhabitants paid a visit to the camp yet?" asked Mr. Dangerfield, during the course of the repast.

" Two Morgans, four Joneses, and three Griffiths, so far, sir," replied Cotton. " They all seemed pleased to see us again. Oh, I forgot. There was another man —a stranger to us."

" Chap with red hair," supplemented Wilson.

" He insisted on giving us a hand," continued the Second, " but all the time he was throwing out hints that he knew of a much better site, and that there was something wrong with this. We told him we hadn't noticed anything wrong when we camped here last year and the year before that. Then he started some yarn about Haunted Harbour, but before he had got very far, Mr. Mills came up."

" And what then?"

" The man said he'd forgotten something, and went off."

" I hadn't a chance to see his face," supplemented Courtney Mills. " For some reason he didn't want to see me, I fancy. However, I am still looking forward to the pleasure of meeting him."

" For what reason?" asked the Scoutmaster.

" Curiosity," rejoined Mills.

" It's a funny thing, sir," observed Cotton, " but we've asked heaps of people here why the place is called Haunted Harbour. Either they say they don't know or else they won't say. And then just as the stranger was going to tell us about it he suddenly hurries off. . . . I say, sir, what's that?"

He pointed in the direction of the partly-ruined village. Roofless gable-ends and squat stone chimneys suddenly appeared silhouetted against a powerful glare in the otherwise dark sky.

" Car," replied Mr. Dangerfield. " Dashed if I'd like to drive over that rough road at night. And he's coming this way, too!"

" I believe it's Hargreaves, sir," exclaimed the Second.

"Nonsense! Whoever it is is turning towards the main road."

But the Scoutmaster was mistaken. Almost noiselessly the car drew rapidly nearer until on the brow of the low hill above the camp its brilliant headlights played full into the faces of the Sea Scouts.

Lurching and rolling, the car descended the sloping expanse of coarse grass. Then came the sound of fierce brakes being applied. The car came to a standstill. The headlights were switched off. Followed, the click of a door being opened and the louder sound of its being slammed.

Then a cheery voice exclaimed:

"Got here at last, sir!"

Patrol Leader Dick Hargreaves had arrived in his super-six latest model sports car, accompanied by a stupendous pile of kit.

"Thought you were lost, Dick," observed Mr. Dangerfield. "We never expected you so late."

"I'm nearly, sir," replied Hargreaves. "Missed the train by a minute, so I simply had to go home and get the old bus out. I didn't do so badly until I crossed the Menai Bridge. Then, of course, I had to slow down. Then when I got to Camlytch I took the wrong turning and soon after that, before I had discovered my mistake, I nearly ran into some men trundling barrels across the road. Of course I pulled up quite easily, but they seemed rather peeved. I couldn't understand what they said, but I gathered they were swearing at me in Welsh!"

"Whereabouts was that, my lad?" asked the Secret Service man.

The patrol leader hesitated. He did not expect to be questioned by a strange voice.

"I forgot; you haven't made the acquaintance of Mr. Courtney Mills, our temporary Scoutmaster," interposed Mr. Dangerfield.

"Pleased to meet you, sir!" exclaimed Dick extending his left hand. Remembering in time, Courtney Mills grasped the proffered hand with his left and shook it warmly.

"I've already heard about you," he said cordially.

"As the most reckless, scatter-brained fellow in the troop, sir? It's not true, really, although I admit I can make a car shift some!"

"But what about those men with the barrels?" asked the Secret Service man.

"I suppose they did have a bit of a shock," explained Hargreaves. "It was close to that old port. I think there was a lorry that had been backed into an opening opposite."

"Late at night for beer-barrels to be taken into an inn," commented Courtney Mills. "Your car didn't hit one, by any chance?"

"No, sir. If it had, I reckon they would have done something more than curse me! . . . What's that, Jimmy? Supper for me? Good egg! I could do with some!"

And the next minute Dick Hargreaves, who was accustomed to a five-course dinner in luxurious style, was tucking into a plateful of Irish stew and thoroughly enjoying it.

CHAPTER IV

The Crash

"What do you think of my new bus, Taff?" demanded Tom Redpole, commonly known to his associates as The Ferret.

"Not so bad, look you," replied Taff. "And where did you get her, whateffer?"

"Pinched it," admitted The Ferret with a grin, stepping back a few paces to look at the somewhat antiquated four-seater. "Pinched it from a parking-place in Holyhead about an hour ago. Belongs to a farmer and being market-day he's not likely to miss it before late in the afternoon."

"A new coat of paint and maybe you'll change the number-plate?"

"Change the number-plate, my foot! A mug's game that! Make the police sit up and take notice when they find it! Now listen: those navy blokes I told you about aren't going straight from Holyhead to Menai Bridge. I've found out that for some reason best known to themselves they're going the roundabout way through Camlytch. Why, I don't know, but it makes the job easier for us. Bill heard them say they were leaving at ten o'clock, so they're due here between half-past ten and eleven. The number of the car is TK 771. Got it?"

" Yes: TK 771," repeated Taff, parrot-like.

" Good—don't forget it. Now then: I'm taking this bus out to the side road a quarter of a mile this side of Tin-y-went. You get on your motor-bike and stop three miles out on the Holyhead road. When you see their car pass, follow them at a respectful distance and wave your handkerchief to me when their car tops the rise at Tin-y-went. Is that clear?"

" Yes. But you are not killing the men, look you?"

" No fear. The Boss is dead against that sort of thing. They won't be going at much of a pace—the road's too narrow and winding for that, but I reckon the shock'll knock all the stuffing out of them for a while."

" But if it doesn't?" asked Taff.

" I've something here that will," replied Redpole, with a grim laugh, as he tapped a case containing a hypodermic syringe. " Directly the blokes are laid out and I've found what I'm wanting, you'll come along with your bike and pick me up. Then we won't be long getting to old David's place."

" What do I get for this, look you?" demanded Taff. " Think of my risk, and you say that the case you're getting is of much value."

" Not to you or me," replied The Ferret. " It's the Boss who gains by it. He's offered fifty pounds if the job's done properly, so you ought to be satisfied with twenty."

" Halves, look you!" haggled the Welshman.

The bargaining went on for some minutes before The Ferret settled the matter.

" Twenty, and not a penny more. I have but to say half a dozen words to the Boss——"

" No, no!" interrupted Taff. " Do not one word say to him whateffer! I'll do it for twenty pounds!"

" Good! Off you go, then! TK 771; the blokes will have left Holyhead by this time!"

Taff mounted his motor-bike and rode off in the direction of Tin-y-went.

Lighting a cigarette, Redpole waited until his henchman was out of sight and then started up his unlawfully acquired car, leaving the engine ticking over in neutral.

It was an ideal spot for an ambush. The main road, such as it was, was just wide enough for two cars to pass with caution. Roughly-built stone walls about four feet in height, bounded it. There were sharp curves at almost every hundred yards of its length, so that speed was out of the question.

The side road into which the Ferret had backed his car was a mere cart-track leading to a deserted copper-works. No vehicle was likely to come that way. At the junction a moderate-sized tree, its trunk inclined by reason of years of gales, made the spot a regular " blind corner "; but since there was no traffic on the branch road the local authorities had not thought it necessary to set up a warning signpost.

Redpole could see for nearly a mile in all directions. While he waited, only one car passed in the opposite direction. The driver, obliged to keep his eyes on the road, did not notice the dilapidated grey tourer some ten yards down the side-road. Traffic was scarce that morning.

Presently he caught sight of a long grey car breasting the hill in the direction of Tin-y-went. Although it was difficult to gauge its speed, since it was almost end-on, he reckoned that it was doing a bare twenty.

A few seconds later a motor-cyclist topped the ridge. Bringing his machine to a standstill and propping it up with his legs, the rider waved a red handkerchief.

Standing on the off-side of the car, the door of which was open, Redpole gave the engine more throttle. Then he waited, hand on gear lever ready to let the gear into lowest.

He was surprised at his own calculated coolness. A couple of seconds either way might make a hash of his plans; certainly two seconds too late would allow the Admiralty car to pass unscathed. Then, more than likely, its justly incensed occupants would pull up, alight and return to demand an explanation. He found himself wondering whether they were armed.

He had to rely upon his sense of vision to act at the crucial moment. The noise of his engine completely outvoiced the gentle purr of the approaching car. All he could go by was the streamlined roof of the saloon.

A sudden wave of doubt assailed him. What if the engine stalled when suddenly let into gear? He had tried it before with satisfactory results, but who could tell whether the ponderous old car would respond this time? A priceless idiot he would be with his "mechanical rammer" stopped dead in a bye-lane and his intended victims speeding serenely on their way, the precious case intact in their possession.

The approaching car now seemed to be travelling at high speed. Actually, at thirty miles an hour, each second was bringing her forty-four feet nearer. Probably for the first time The Ferret realized the tremendous difference between estimations of speed by a driver and a pedestrian.

He slammed in the gear lever. The old car leapt forward, the sudden jerk slamming the door violently.

Although he jumped clear Redpole narrowly escaped having his coat-pocket caught in the handle of the rear door.

It was all over in a split second.

Before the naval man could apply his brakes—in any case there wasn't time to pull up or even to decrease speed with any effect—the impact came.

There was a hideous crash of metal, the shattering of glass; a momentary vision of both cars slewing round, locked in a close embrace.

A period of almost complete silence followed. Both engines had stopped. The cloud of steam from the pulverized radiator of the tourer rose in the calm air, mingled with dust churned from the roadway. Not a sound or a movement came from the occupants of the ambushed car.

Even The Ferret, who considered himself immune from moral and mental shocks, stood aghast at the result of his handiwork.

But only for a few seconds.

There was the prize waiting to be extricated from that battered object that had been an up-to-date saloon car. A dump merchant would consider himself injured if he were asked to buy the wreckage for a couple of pounds!

The Ferret had no need to open one of the doors. All had been wrenched from their hinges by the impact. The driver was huddled up, his head resting upon the twisted steering-wheel. The triplex glass of the wind-screen had been forced from its frame by the unfortunate man's head. The dashboard looked as if someone had upset a pot of crimson paint over it. . . .

The other occupant was lying with his feet on the floor and his body, from the waist upwards, drooping across the buckled running-board.

" I didn't think there'd be such a precious mess as this," thought Redpole, with a tinge of remorse.

His immediate task was not to render aid to his unfortunate victims, but to gain possession of the metal case containing the secret device which the Canadian millionaire, Ambrose Lartnec, had backed to the tune of a million dollars.

Did one of the apparently lifeless men carry it on him? The Ferret shuddered at the thought of having to search them. Or was it amongst that small heap of luggage displaced from the rear seat?

He decided to search the luggage first.

There were two small suitcases, nearly new and bearing their owners' initials. One had burst its lock and its contents—mostly articles of apparel—were shamelessly exposed.

Right under the debris was a blue leather dispatch-case bearing the Admiralty crest of the " foul anchor " in gold. It was intact. The double locks had withstood the shock. Only the red wax seal upon a tape ribbon had suffered.

Whipping out his knife, The Ferret soon slit the leather apart. Within was a dull-metal case—he'd seen cigar cases larger than that—enclosed in wrappings of some substance resembling cotton-wool.

" Explosive of sorts," commented the finder. " Wonder it hadn't been touched off and blown the whole show to blazes! Couldn't have made much more of a mess, though!"

Carefully he placed his prize in the inside breast-pocket of his coat. This done, he was about to see what could be done for the two senseless men, when he heard the splutter of a motor-bike engine.

It was Taff, almost speechless with terrified excitement.

" Look you what's coming!" he shouted in a high falsetto; and without waiting to take his confederate on the pillion, he let in the clutch and disappeared down the windy road in a cloud of dust and bluish smoke.

Redpole stood upright and looked in the direction given by his faithless accomplice.

Running down the gentle slope and agilely leaping over the low stone wall that bounded the fields were about half a dozen figures in blue, and wearing white caps.

At first sight The Ferret took them to be naval seamen. Then he " tumbled to it ".

" Those confounded Sea Scouts!" he ejaculated.

His first instinct was to take to his heels. That would be hopeless. In spite of his long start he would be bound to be spotted as he crossed the open. Although a fairly good runner he could not keep up the pace, and he would not stand an earthly chance against those agile, well-trained youths.

He had already planned a line of retreat if, as had happened, Taff let him down.

The tree.

It was an easy matter to get to it, crawling on hands and knees yet covering the ground at a fair pace. Easier, too, to hide behind the trunk from those meddlesome Sea Scouts who seemed to be butting in at all inopportune moments. Hadn't one of them nearly run down some of his gang as they were shifting some illegal merchandise?

But it was no easy matter to swarm up the gnarled trunk. In spite of his monkey-like agility, Redpole had all his work cut out to spring and reach the lowermost branch. How the leaves shook as the none too robust limb bent under his weight. He wondered whether any of those alert youngsters—the nearmost of whom was now but fifty yards away—would notice the unusual quivering of the leaves on a windless day.

Then up and up he climbed until he was hidden from all directions by the dense foliage.

He listened intently. Someone—it was certainly not a full-grown man—was giving crisp orders. Nothing he said pointed to any suspicion that the perpetrator of the outrage was concealed but thirty or forty feet away.

The Ferret breathed freely once more.

CHAPTER V

Jimmy Cotton's Uniform

One of the trickiest bits of work in camp was providing Second Jimmy Cotton with a new rig-out. It wasn't Jimmy's fault but rather his misfortune that he had to appear at the annual camp in uniform that wasn't exactly smart, but rather the reverse.

For fifty weeks in the year Jimmy worked at a garage. He was supposed to be an apprentice earning the princely sum of six shillings a week. Incidentally he acquired mechanical knowledge as readily as a duck takes to water, so that before he had been at the garage many months he was earning money for his employer at the rate of about five hundred per cent above the paltry pittance paid him.

Although Cotton could not be described as the sole support of his widowed mother—she had to scrape in order to enable him to complete his apprenticeship—he gave most of his earnings towards his food and keep. His pocket-money came to sixpence a week, but by dint of strict economy he managed to save enough for his expenses in camp.

That left nothing for the upkeep and renewal of his uniform which, by the way, he had won in a competition organized by one of the " boys' weeklies ".

Although his rigout was spotlessly clean it was obviously much the worse for wear. There was a frayed rim round the edge of his cap, in spite of careful darning and much ironing. His jersey, too, was patched and darned until it looked a pretty hopeless proposition even to that cheerful young optimist, its owner. As for shorts, that dark blue patch, although neatly made, seemed to accentuate the faded, salt-stained material to which it had been applied. His scarf, too, which was supposed to be orange, had faded to such an extent that it would hardly pass for lemon!

The trouble was that Jimmy Cotton was so independent in certain matters that his chums were reluctant to say anything to him about it. They weren't going to run the risk of spoiling a splendid comradeship! Nor did Mr. Dangerfield like broaching the matter. He, too, realized that the Second of the Otter Patrol was extremely sensitive on the subject of his poverty. It was worse than useless to offer to give Jimmy Cotton a new rig-out, and yet the S.M. wondered what the District Commissioner might say when he paid his visit of inspection to the camp. And the District Commissioner was keen on " smartness on parade ", in which, in his opinion, uniform played an important part.

" I wonder if you can give your pal Jimmy a gentle hint, Hargreaves," remarked Mr. Dangerfield to the Patrol Leader of the Otters.

" I could, sir," replied Dick, with a cheerful smile, " but I'd run the risk of a thick ear! Never you mind, sir, I'll fix him up with a new rig-out."

That conversation took place soon after eight o'clock of the morning in which The Ferret was planning his ambush of the Admiralty car.

The morning was warm and sunny. The walls of the tents had been rolled up and kit was laid out for the S.M.'s inspection. While in camp it was the usual custom for the Sea Scouts to wear " any old thing or even nothing but a pair of shorts ".

Dick Hargreaves and Jimmy Cotton each had small separate tents, one on either side of the bell-tent in which the rest of the patrol slept. The " Otters " were in the centre of the line of five patrols and immediately facing the camp flagstaff.

" Do you mind sending for Jimmy and keeping him in conversation in your tent, sir?" asked Dick with a solemn wink. " Talk to him about anything except his rigout. Five minutes will be enough."

" No ragging, I hope?" asked the S.M. cautiously.

" No, sir."

The Sea Scout's kit had been laid out for inspection, when Mr. Dangerfield called out:

" Just a minute, Cotton. I want to ask you about something."

Jimmy went off at the double, all unsuspecting the well-meaning trick his chum Dick was about to play on him.

Going to the tent, the patrol leader emerged holding the container and reflector of his lamp. The reflector was a concave mirror and not of the ordinary fluted metal type.

This he placed upon the ground, carefully adjusting it until the focal point of the reflected sun's rays impinged upon the neatly folded pile of clothing that was Jimmy Cotton's. The rest of the Sea Scouts were wandering along the rocky foreshore until the whistle sounded for the fall-in.

To establish an alibi Hargreaves strolled over to Mr. Mills' tent.

Courtney Mills was reading a telegram that had just been handed to him. It was a matter of slight wonderment to the troop — none of whom had as yet been let into the real reason for his presence in camp—why the visiting Scoutmaster received and sent so many telegrams.

"Come in, Hargreaves!" was the Secret Service man's invitation. "Seen any of your barrel-rolling friends again?"

"No, sir. Did you find the inn?"

"Yes, a perfectly respectable place, from all accounts. I expect the brewer's van had a breakdown that night and was late in consequence."

"But brewers' vans usually have their name painted on them, sir; this wasn't a van but an open lorry. Perhaps they do things differently in Anglesey from other parts of the country. . . . Hello! what's that? Something's burning!"

There was! A steadily increasing cloud of smoke was rising in the sultry air.

A number of shrill blasts on the S.M.'s whistle brought the Sea Scouts racing towards the scene of the outbreak. They were forestalled, however, by

Hargreaves, Cotton and Mr. Mills, and by the time the others arrived the fire had been stamped out.

Jimmy Cotton retrieved what was left of his kit from the fire. There wasn't much—a badly charred pair of shorts; a riddled jersey, the fumes of which made everybody around sneeze and cough; a blackened object that once had been a Sea Scout's cap; the remains of a belt, and a fragment that was identified as the Second's erstwhile orange scarf.

Meanwhile the patrol leader had stealthily removed the reflector that had caused the fire, and was watching to see how Jimmy took his loss. The rest of the troop gathered round, their faces showing mingled amusement and concern at the sight of the fire-devastated relics of the Second's kit.

" Rough luck, Jimmy!" exclaimed one of the lads sympathetically. " How did it happen?"

" My fault, I expect," was Cotton's unexpected reply. " I had potash lozenges in my pocket—and matches. Perhaps the two got mixed up!"

He did his level best to carry out the Scout's maxim: " Keep smiling ". It required some doing when it dawned upon him that without uniform he would be debarred from leaving camp, and certainly would not be able to take part in the troop inspection—unless, of course, he threw aside his quixotic principles and accepted the practical help of his chums.

It was then that Dick stepped into the breach.

" Rough luck, old man!" he declared. " Look here, I've heaps of kit. Come along and see what can be done. We're both about the same size and it will only require changing the P.L.'s stripes to those of a Second!"

In less than ten minutes Jimmy Cotton reappeared in a brand-new uniform and looking somewhat self-conscious as the result. He had to admit that although clothes don't make a man, a smart, well-fitting uniform does help a Sea Scout to look and be efficient!

After breakfast the S.M. called Hargreaves aside.

" I didn't know you were going to that length, my lad," he said. " Technically you've committed arson, you know."

Dick Hargreaves grinned and nodded in the direction of his chum, who was surrounded by a group of appreciative Sea Scouts.

" I had to risk that, sir," he replied. " There didn't seem any other way; and since I'd brought kit purposely for Jimmy, I simply had to make him take it!"

CHAPTER VI

The Otters to the Rescue

Patrol-Leader Hargreaves was an asset to the troop in more ways than one. His father, one of the partners in the well-known salvage firm of Findon & Rayse, was only too pleased to think that his only son, instead of wasting his time as many well-to-do youths of his acquaintance were doing, was so keen on taking up Sea Scouting. It was a healthy, open-air pursuit that gave a young fellow not only the opportunity of gaining seafaring experience but taught him how to use his wits in a tight corner.

Mr. Hargreaves had been generous to the troop. Gifts of books, gear and equipment had helped them to attain a fair degree of efficiency, since Sea Scouts, however keen, cannot hope to do much without the necessary gear, which must be sound enough for safety afloat.

Amongst other gifts from the patrol leader's parent was a diving outfit, complete with air-pumps, and already several of the troop had gone through an elementary course of diving under the tuition of one of the firm's experienced deep-sea divers. Mr. Hargreaves had made one stipulation: that the depth in which the Sea Scouts were allowed to work beneath the surface was not to exceed seven fathoms.

So after breakfast the three patrols were told off for their respective morning's work.

The Eels and the Kestrels were to do a little diving practice in the bay, with the Scoutmaster in charge; the Eagles and the Hawks under Mr. Mills, who as an experienced yachtsman was qualified to take command, were dispatched in one of the sailing boats to improve their seamanship; while the Otters were told off to take a trek-cart and proceed to Pont-y-Gylos farm where there was a load of firewood waiting for them to collect. Firewood, as has already been mentioned, was scarce in the neighbourhood of the camp, so that the offer of a friendly farmer to give the lads a number of logs was well worth the four-mile journey inland.

Of course they would rather have gone afloat. " Rotten jobs ashore " seemed to come their way more than they did to the other patrols. Perhaps that was one of the penalties for smartness in carrying out orders, because the Otters certainly were the most efficient of the five patrols. They had a suspicion that the more they did well the more they were expected to do.

There were no outward signs of disappointment when the Otters formed up, ready for the expedition. Each Sea Scout, in addition to his sheath knife, carried his axe. A felling axe, several lengths of rope and a first-aid case were placed in the trek-cart. They might have to cut the timber into shorter lengths;

the rope was necessary to lash it down, while the first-aid case would be wanted if the rough work produced any injuries in the form of cuts or splinter wounds.

Patrol Leader Dick Hargreaves was in charge of the party. He had been handed a map and told to decide upon his route, since there were three, all diverse, but approximately the same length, leading to Pont-y-Gylos farm.

Wilson and Harvey, two of the heaviest youths, were told off to man the shafts; Ginger Smith and Matterson, the younger members of the patrol, were to take the drag ropes, while Blacklock was bidden to fetch his bicycle in case it was necessary to send anyone on an errand. Hargreaves and Cotton walked ahead, ready to take their share in the hauling when the gradients were against them.

After going a couple of miles they halted at a road junction. Consulting his map, for the signpost gave little if any assistance, Dick discovered that either road could be taken. They twisted to such an extent that the place where they reunited was hardly a quarter of a mile away, but to reach that spot by road meant nearly three times that distance.

" That's Tin-y-went Hill we can see," announced the patrol leader pointing to the rising ground. " If we take the left turning we may save a stiffish climb. Getting tired, Ginger?"

" No fear," replied Smith. " I could do——"

The distant sound of a dull crash interrupted Ginger's remarks. Those of the Sea Scouts who were sitting by the roadside sprang to their feet. Every member of the party peered across the stone wall-enclosed fields in an endeavour to locate the source of the sinister noise.

"Sounds like an aeroplane crashing," declared Blacklock.

"We'd have heard the engine if there had been one," rejoined Wilson.

"Not if the engine had stopped and——"

"There it is!" exclaimed the patrol leader, as a cloud of vapour appeared above the farthest visible wall. "Close to that tree. It's a car smash! Let's see if we can be of any help!"

"Don't leave the trek-cart there, you fellows," cautioned Jimmy Cotton. "Push it off the road or something'll barge into it."

"Good idea, Jimmy!" added the patrol leader. "Never thought of that myself. Get on your bike, Blacklock, take two turns to the left. You'll be there before us and you may have to go for assistance."

Fortunately there was a piece of grassland close to where the trek-cart party had stopped. Elsewhere the stone walls abutted upon the road. The cart was quickly run on to the verge, Hargreaves grabbed the first-aid case, and before Blacklock could get into the saddle his chums were scaling the wall and running across the fields towards the spot where the accident had occurred.

It was a nasty sight that met their eyes. Hargreaves, the first to arrive, almost jumped upon the wreckage as he leapt over the wall, for the front of one car had been telescoped against the rough masonry, while the other seemed to have forced its way halfway through the other vehicle.

It was not the occasion to see what had happened to the cars. There were human beings to demand immediate assistance.

The Sea Scouts' first difficulty was how to remove the injured from the wreckage without causing them additional harm. They looked in such a terrible state, and lay motionless in such awkward positions, that the patrol leader hesitated.

"Are they dead?" asked Matterson in an awe-struck voice.

"Can't say," replied Hargreaves. "Looks as if they have broken limbs, both of them. Gently now; two of you on each side. Don't let his legs or arms drop. Together—lift!"

They placed the first victim on the hard road—there was no other spot available. Ginger grabbed one of the car seats—and a beastly sticky mess it was in!—and pushed it gently under the head of the unconscious man.

Then, while the Second and Wilson set to work to staunch the blood that welled from the gash in the man's forehead, the others, including Blacklock, who had just arrived, got to work to extricate the other victim.

That was even a more difficult task because he was wedged between the bent steering column and the dashboard, with his feet entangled in the gear and brake pedals.

He, too, was deposited on the ground.

" He's still alive!" declared the patrol leader. " Look here, Blacklock, ride like blue blazes to Camlytch, and fetch Doctor Morgan. Then inform the police!"

Blacklock mounted and rode off.

" I think someone's gone for help already," observed Harvey.

" How do you know that?" demanded the patrol leader, without pausing in his work of bandaging the second victim.

" 'Cause I heard a motor-bike as we were coming across the fields. The fellow was riding like mad by the noise his exhaust made. You heard it too, didn't you, Ginger?"

Ginger Smith agreed.

" The more the better in this case," remarked Hargreaves. " See if you can find some clean water, Matterson. We've used up all the iodine. I wonder if they have an ambulance at Camlytch or will they have to send all the way to Holyhead?"

It seemed a pretty hopeless task applying first aid to these two grievously injured men. All the Sea Scouts could do was to attempt to stop the flow of blood from the worst injuries and then to stand by until medical aid was forthcoming.

They now had breathing space and an opportunity to survey the wreckage.

" Two fellows each driving alone, meeting in a head-on collision," declared Cotton.

" But both were in the same car," protested Wilson.

" One might have been thrown into it by the impact," persisted the Second in defence of his previous statement. "Besides, if both of them were in this car, where is the driver of the other?" he inquired with an air of finality.

The Sea Scouts examined the tourer. The dashboard had been forced back, taking the steering wheel with it, until it almost touched the front seat. Anyone sitting on the latter would have his legs severely crushed. Yet there was not the slightest trace of blood anywhere in or on the car.

"Perhaps this bus was standing when the other hit it," suggested Wilson. "Sort of thing some mugs would do; leave a car just round a bend. The driver got out before the crash and then got frightened and hooked it. Or perhaps the motor-cyclist gave him a lift."

"Leaving these two chaps injured and unconscious in their car, eh?" rejoined Cotton witheringly. "Hardly likely, is it? Look at these wheel marks. This car must have come out of that narrow lane and barged into the other."

"Then where is the driver?" asked the patrol leader. Then he turned at the sound of a groan from one of the injured men.

The latter had partly recovered consciousness. He tried in vain to raise his head. Failing that, he lifted his least injured hand and beckoned.

"What is it?" asked the patrol leader, bending down to him.

The man mumbled some unintelligible words.

Hargreaves shook his head.

" I can't quite understand you."

Again the man tried to express himself.

" Can you write?" suggested the patrol leader, offering his notebook and pencil.

With an effort, for Hargreaves had to hold the paper, the injured man wrote:

" Blue case in car. Please bring it to me."

" Righto!" replied the patrol leader. " I'll get it."

He searched in the rear of the wrecked car. Between two suitcases he found the article in question. He noticed that it bore the sign of the Admiralty " foul anchor ". The leather had been ripped open. The case contained nothing.

" It's empty," he reported.

With a great effort the Admiralty official raised his head. He spoke slowly but clearly:

" Ask the police to telegraph to the Admiralty that KI has been stolen. Tell them where and how. Can you do this at once? KI, you'll remember that?"

" Very good, sir," replied the patrol leader. " I'll see to it at once."

" Thanks!" gasped the injured man, and sank back into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER VII

Clues

" Gosh!" ejaculated Wilson. " We're mixed up in a spy case."

" Seems like it," agreed Hargreaves. " Blacklock should be back very soon. I'll borrow his bike and go to the police station. The doctor will be here before then, I hope. Look here, Jimmy, you'd better take charge of the patrol, and as soon as the doctor can spare you, you'll carry on and fetch the wood from the farm."

The patrol leader waited. It would be quicker to go on Blacklock's bicycle when he returned than to start at once and walk all the way.

Presently a car arrived and drew up. From it alighted a tall, grey-haired man carrying a black bag. Hargreaves, who had made the doctor's acquaintance during a previous camp, saluted.

" Bit of a bad smash," observed the doctor, after he had made an examination of the two injured men. " You lads have done splendidly. Keeping down the hæmorrhage has saved them from bleeding to death; but I rather suspect severe internal injuries. I've sent for the ambulance and it should be here at any moment. Until then I can do very little."

It seemed strange to the Sea Scouts that Dr. Morgan appeared to be so casual over the business. Actually it was a tribute to their skill in first-aid work. Until the two victims could be treated in hospital there was nothing the doctor could do. Since the two men were insensible he had not even to give them morphia.

"They won't die, will they, sir?" asked Jimmy.

"Not before their time, young man," replied Dr. Morgan. "They've youth in their favour and look as if they've lived cleanly. That's half the battle, although one cannot say at this juncture if they have sustained internal injuries."

A minute or so later the ambulance arrived, closely followed by the freely perspiring Blacklock on his push-bicycle.

Leaving his Second to take charge of the patrol, Hargreaves, taking the rifled dispatch-case with him as evidence, rode off on his borrowed mount.

It took him some time to get the station sergeant to dispatch the telegram. The officer wanted a detailed account of the accident, and was preparing to write it down, until the patrol leader produced the rifled case and pointed to the Admiralty emblem.

"It's a serious accident, sergeant," he declared, "but you can get particulars on the spot. One of the injured men asked particularly that the message I gave you should be sent to the Admiralty as quickly as possible. You may get into serious trouble if you cause unnecessary delay!"

It was rather a bold speech, but the patrol leader's words gained the point. Replacing his notebook the sergeant picked up the telephone and got through to Camlytch post office.

Somewhat to Hargreaves' surprise the telephonic message was in Welsh.

" It iss quite all right, see you," declared the sergeant, as he replaced the receiver. " What I said was to the Airdmirality you telegraph: ' Car containing two officers wrecked near Camlytch, Anglesey.' "

" Thanks! That ought to do," said the patrol leader.

They separated outside the police station, the sergeant riding off to the scene of the accident, and the patrol leader making for the camp.

" Hello, Hargreaves! Back already?" was Mr. Dangerfield's greeting, when the patrol leader eventually found him directing the diving operations from the shore, for the beginners were given the preliminary lessons in a natural pool where the deepest water was only ten feet in depth. " Where are the others?"

Briefly, Hargreaves explained what had happened.

Somewhat to the patrol leader's surprise the Scoutmaster gave two short blasts and one long on his whistle—a warning call to the boats that were sailing close-hauled about two hundred yards offshore.

The call was similarly acknowledged.

" Semaphore Mr. Mills and ask him to return as soon as possible, Dick!" ordered the S.M.

The message was read by at least half a dozen of the Sea Scouts, though strangely enough, their acting Scoutmaster was unable to read semaphore.

Almost at once the boats altered course and, still under sail, were beached on the soft sand of the cove.

" I'm going to let you into a secret, Dick," said Mr. Dangerfield. " For the present don't say a word about it to anyone else. Mr. Mills is a Scotland Yard man. He's on a special mission here, and it looks as if you've found a clue for him!"

Taking Courtney Mills aside, the Scoutmaster told him of what had occurred.

" This is serious," declared the Secret Service man. " You say the supposed accident occurred near Tin-y-went and that you saw no sign of the occupant of the other car? Did you examine the road for footprints?"

" No, sir," admitted Hargreaves frankly. " We had all our work cut out to attend to the injured men. But we did trace the tracks of the other car."

" H'm. And no doubt by this time any footprints have been obliterated. Well, I'll go and see for myself."

" Do you want me to show you the way, sir?" asked Dick.

Courtney Mills declined the offer. He had very good reasons for playing a lone hand in the task that was set before him.

By the time the Secret Service man had arrived at the scene of the collision the ambulance had removed the victims to hospital. A break-down equipment had hauled the battered remains of both cars to a garage. A liberal sprinkling of sand had obliterated all signs of blood and had also destroyed every trace of footprints that might have provided Courtney Mills with important clues.

But what he did find were the fairly distinct imprints of oily hands upon the wall under the tree. From the patrol leader's description he knew that the Sea Scouts had come upon the scene from the opposite direction, and therefore there seemed no reason why any of them should have scaled the wall on that side of the road.

Using his camera focussed at thirty inches Courtney took two exposures from slightly different angles. Then he devoted his attention to the ground on the other side of the wall. It was sun-dried and showed not the faintest impression. The spare, coarse grass had been trodden down, clearly indicating that someone had been there at no distant time—certainly since last night's heavy dew.

An examination of the tree trunk told him that someone had climbed it quite recently. Courtney asked himself why? It was much too late in the year for boys to go bird-nesting.

Carefully avoiding the side of the trunk on which the climber's boot-marks were discernible, the Secret Service man swarmed up. At each branch he stopped and sniffed. There were no hand-prints but there was a faint though distinct smell of mineral oil.

Then he gave a grunt of satisfaction. He had found a branch upon which someone had sat; adhering to the rough bark was a wisp of brown cloth.

" Many a criminal has put a rope round his neck with less than that," thought the Secret Service man, as he placed the incriminating relic in his pocket-book.

. . . .

Five minutes after the wrecked cars had been removed, and a bare quarter of an hour before Courtney Mills arrived upon the scene, The Ferret stealthily descended from his place of concealment.

To do him justice, he felt genuinely relieved when he overheard Dr. Morgan's reassuring statement concerning the condition of the victims. Although, like most criminals of his type, he would stoically undergo punishment if by chance his misdeed were detected and he himself were arrested, he had no wish to have the guilt of murder placed upon him. Violence, if he considered it necessary, he wouldn't hesitate to commit. He would not think twice about knocking his opponent insensible in order to achieve a get-away. But he drew the line at murder.

Gaining the road at a point about two hundred yards from the scene of the collision, Redpole walked boldly towards Camlytch. He was still feeling incensed against Taff for his cowardly desertion, although, he reflected, in the circumstances, he had been able to watch developments on the spot and without being seen.

The ambush had been completely successful. The precious metal case containing some highly secret device, valued at least at a million dollars, was in his possession. All that remained to be done was to hand it over to his mysterious employer, Mr. Apulgrab, on board the yacht *Katharina*. Then, he reckoned, his responsibility ended, and if Apulgrab failed to reward him with what he considered to be a generous amount for his services then he knew how to " put the screw on!" If need be, a letter from him to the Admiralty, and a British destroyer would deal most effectively with Apulgrab and the arms-smuggling yacht *Katharina*, together with the stolen KI, whatever that might be. All that depended upon Apulgrab's ideas of a fitting remuneration for services rendered!

Arriving at the Faucet Inn—one of the few habitable buildings on the decayed part of Camlytch Port—Redpole entered the bar. There were about a dozen men there—it was a few minutes after noon—and amongst them were some who did not belong to the gang.

" Where's Taff?" inquired The Ferret " with intent ".

" Haven't seen him since last night. Told me he was stopping the night with his people over by Rhospwll. Want him?"

" Not particularly. I've been into Beaumaris by the bus. There was a parcel for him: too heavy for me to lug down here. The conductor left it at Davis's."

Redpole ordered a glass, tossed off the contents and went to his room at the back of the inn and overlooking the neglected tidal harbour. There he washed off the grime and oil and changed his clothes. As he did so he noticed a ragged tear below the knee of his trousers.

" Wonder where and when I did that?" he said to himself, and, being of a particularly cautious nature in such matters, he rolled the trousers into a bundle and went into the kitchen.

" What have you burning in the stove, William?"

inquired the innkeeper's wife in Welsh a few minutes later.

"I've burnt nothing, woman," was the reply. "I told you yesterday it was time the chimney was swept. It's burning soot you smell."

He turned to Redpole and winked knowingly.

Redpole returned the wink.

He had destroyed a possible clue in the mystery of the disappearance of KI.

Acc- No 71783

CHAPTER VIII

The Legend of Haunted Harbour

The afternoon passed uneventfully as far as the Sea Scouts were concerned. The other patrols had learnt of the " accident " from the Otters and the topic was one of considerable interest.

Hargreaves had the additional excitement of being let into the secret that Courtney Mills was not really a Scoutmaster but some one of even greater importance than Mr. Dangerfield—a real, live member of New Scotland Yard. His one regret was that he was unable to pass on the information to his chum Cotton; but there was a slight measure of consolation in the S.M.'s promise that before long every member of the troop would be let into the secret, and perhaps—with an emphasis on the " perhaps "—Courtney Mills would employ them to assist him in the unravelling of the rapidly growing mystery.

During the evening—the Secret Service man was still absent from camp—the Sea Scouts were " standing easy " before supper and awaiting the ceremony of hauling down the flag, when The Ferret strolled up.

Already, although he had not been present at the previous camps, he was becoming a familiar figure.

None of the lads knew him by the name of Redpole nor by his common appellation of The Ferret. To them he was simply known as Bill the 'Longshoreman. It would have been an eye-opener to them had they seen The Ferret in action as the leader of Apulgrab's shore gang! They would have been still more astonished had they known that the man they called Bill the 'Longshoreman had been hiding within thirty feet of the Otters only that morning on the road near Tin-y-went.

" You're always trying to put the wind up us over something about Haunted Harbour, Bill," said Wilcox banteringly. " Come on, now; out with it! Why is the place called Haunted Harbour?"

Redpole pretended not to bite at first. A feigned reluctance on his part would give greater effect to his yarn.

" Didn't I tell you us Camlytch folk are fair scared to mention it?" he asked.

" I didn't know you were a Camlytch man, Bill," countered Hargreaves. " We never saw you here last year or the one before that."

" That don't take much explaining. Most summers I'm away in a little coaster—the *Mary Evans* o' Bangor—runnin' up to Maryport and Cockermouth and as far south as Appledore an' Barnstaple. Last June she piled herself up on The Stacks an' (lowering his voice) I reckon that was 'cause I'd let on to the skipper about the story of Haunted Harbour."

" Well, tell us the yarn, Bill," prompted Jimmy Cotton. " We aren't afraid."

" Sure you're not afraid, my lad?" demanded Redpole, staring into the Second's face. " Are you *quite* sure you ain't afraid?"

" No, I'm not," declared Jimmy Cotton, and yet, somehow, he did feel just a little uneasy.

" All right, then. Sit yourselves round and listen while I tell you the story of Haunted Cove."

" You mean Haunted Harbour," interrupted Ginger Smith.

" Well, ain't a cove a harbour?" countered The Ferret swiftly. He was a bit nettled at his obvious slip. " Now, everyone ready?"

By this time he had gathered a considerable audience. All the patrols were represented, while Mr. Dangerfield hovered in the background. If this supposed 'Longshoreman were entertaining the lads with yarns connected with the sea, well and good. It gave him a brief respite from the almost continuous questions with which the Sea Scouts plied their Scoutmaster.

" It goes back a mighty long way—the 13th of August, 1780—to be exact. And the thirteenth of the month is the day after to-morrow, mark you. There was a brig of about a hundred an' fifty tons registered at Liverpool and owned by a Camlytch man of the name of Davy Jones. Now there ain't no cause for you to laugh, you boy wi' the red thatch! Davy Jones is a common enough name in these parts and maybe most of 'em have a locker of sorts. That don't signify they've any connexion wi' Davy Jones' Locker wot seamen talk about; but when one comes to think about it perhaps there is.

" Well, this *Mary Jones*, that being the name of the brig, being called after the cap'n and owner's missus—had been doin' a bit of work carryin' slaves from Africa to Charleston. They'd done so well that every jack of the crew was able to sport a pair of gold earrings. That was the custom of those days and it died hard amongst seafaring folk. At any rate, soon after midnight on the 13th of August, the *Mary Jones* bound for Liverpool, rounded the North Stacks, but got well inshore in Camlytch Bay. Afore the crew apparently discovered where they were—and it was a bright moonlight night—she struck on the rocks just inside yon island."

He pointed to the East Rat, a small rocky, uninhabited islet separated from the coast by a stretch of deep water hardly a half cable's length wide. Often in fine weather the Sea Scouts had landed there.

" Believe me or believe me not," continued Redpole. " The brig heeled and went down with all sail set in less than a couple of minutes after she'd struck. You see, her keel was on the edge of the reef and when she heeled she slipped off and sank in deep water. There she was, a taut little brig, a perfect picture in the moonlight one minute. At another there is nothing left of her but a few heads of swimmers making for the shore.

" Although the sea was smooth there was a big swell against the rocks. She carried a big crew for her size, did the *Mary Jones*, as they had to in those days 'cause of pirates an' the like—but few of them were able to swim. Some of them were dashed against the rocks, but five, including the cap'n, got ashore at the mouth of a cave."

"What cave?" asked Cotton. "That large one where we can take our cutter in under sail?"

"That's telling," replied The Ferret mysteriously. "You don't want to run into trouble more'n you've done already, do you? Now then, we've got to where the cap'n and four men got ashore alive. Then what happened? I'll tell you: there was a gang of wreckers in the cave! Whether they'd shown a light to lure the brig out of her course I don't know. Maybe they did, expecting her to come ashore in a sandy cove where they could have stripped her of everything when the tide left her."

"What! Wrecked a vessel belonging to Camlytch?" asked Hargreaves.

"That's just what they did. You see, the *Mary Jones* wasn't expected for another month or so and in any case one brig's much like another—or was in those times. However, disappointed at not getting a rich haul, the wreckers knocked the survivors on the head, tore their gold earrings from their ears and hacked the cap'n's finger to get the ring he was wearing. Then they tumbled the corpses back into the surf.

"The wreckers had been working by torchlight, which wasn't very good, but next morning when the leader of the gang came to examine the loot he found that the ring was his son's. He had killed his own son for the sake of a few quids' worth of gold."

"But surely the father would have recognized his son by his face or his voice," suggested Cotton.

"The brig had been foreign for nigh on seven years and the cap'n's figure-head might have changed considerably since he was last home. Perhaps he went away clean-shaven and came back with a beard. As for his voice, I reckon he was beyond speech after swimming through the surf. In any case, the wreckers had a dirty job to do and lost no time over it."

"They were found out, I take it," said the patrol leader. "Otherwise how could the yarn come down to the present time?"

"That's how Haunted Harbour came to get its name," resumed Redpole, lowering his voice almost to a whisper. "The cap'n's father, filled with remorse, confessed to the authorities. They sent the soldiers, and the whole gang was rounded up. They were tried and condemned to be hung in chains just above low-water mark at the entrance to the old harbour. As you know, the tide rises twenty feet or more hereabouts.

"Ever since then, on the anniversary of the wreck of the *Mary Jones*—that's two days from now—the ghosts of the cap'n and his crew and their murderers appear on this side of Haunted Harbour. You can hear the clanking of the chains in which the wreckers were hanged—leastways if you do great misfortune'll overtake you afore the year's out. That's why you'll not see a soul near the haunted tower after dark, while on the 11th of August no one in Camlytch'll go within half a mile of this spot so as not to run the risk of hearing the clanking of the felons' chains. That's the story of Haunted Harbour. You've asked for it and now you've got it. I'm not superstitious, but I won't fly in the face of Providence. If I were you I'd take good care to shift out of this before the day after to-morrow."

"That's all bosh, Bill," exclaimed Cotton. "We never heard anything of that sort last August or the August before."

"That's the way to deal with old stories of that sort, Jimmy!" exclaimed Courtney Mills, who, unperceived by 'Longshoreman Bill and his youthful audience, had joined Mr. Dangerfield on the fringe of the circle. "An arresting yarn, my man," he continued, addressing The Ferret, "and parts of it are probably authentic—the loss of the *Mary Jones*, for instance. I believe this is the cave where the survivors came ashore. Can you tell me if I'm right?"

He held out a quarter-plate photograph.

All unsuspecting, Redpole grasped the unmounted print and studied it for a few moments.

"No, it isn't, sir," he replied. "That's Porthpaen farther along t'other side of the harbour."

"That's a pity," rejoined the Secret Service man, taking the returned print very carefully and placing it in his pocket-book. "Well, thanks for entertaining us, but I think Mr. Dangerfield will agree with me that these lads can reasonably be pardoned for doubting the latter part of it."

"And we certainly won't shift camp on that account," added the Scoutmaster. "Come on, lads! Supper's ready!"

CHAPTER IX

—and its Effect

Tom Redpole, otherwise The Ferret, alias 'Longshoreman Bill walked away in a distinctly resentful mood. His story, based upon fact and borne out by the superstitious nature of the local inhabitants, had, as far as the desired effects were concerned, fallen upon barren ground.

He had failed to curdle the blood of his youthful audience. They had greeted his attempt with thinly-veiled mirth. And because he was superstitious in many things, he could not but envy them their complete incredulity.

When the Sea Scouts arrived in camp The Ferret had regarded Courtney Mills with suspicion. That suspicion was now allayed. Quite unfortunately for him he had come to look upon Courtney Mills as one of those peculiar individuals who seem to enjoy themselves going about in shorts and taking charge of a crowd of prying boys! Undoubtedly, he decided, the presence of these Sea Scouts at Camlytch was a bit of a nuisance. He'd done his best to get them to shift; but, after all, they kept early hours and did not roam about at night.

So the nocturnal operations of the gang under his supervision could proceed and in due course the owner of the yacht *Katharina* would receive the consignment of arms and, what was far more important, the small metal case containing the secret device now known to him as KI.

He would not have felt so optimistic if he could have seen Courtney Mills and the Scoutmaster in the latter's tent after " Lights Out ".

" That fellow they call 'Longshoreman Bill may be harmless," said the Secret Service man, " but I have my doubts. The way he hangs about the camp gives me to think that he's trying to pick up information about something. Of course I may be wrong, but on the other hand I can't act on mere suspicion."

" Do you want me to tell him to keep away?" asked Mr. Dangerfield.

" By no means! Provided he isn't a nuisance I'd be obliged if he could be encouraged—at least for a few days more. He claims to be a seaman, but did you notice his hands?"

" Can't say that I did," admitted Mr. Dangerfield.

" Do you mind if I try a little experiment on you to prove my contention?"

" Not in the least."

" Then just let your arms hang naturally. That's it—exactly what I want! The backs of your hands are slightly towards me: that's because you spend a good deal of your time afloat."

" I don't quite follow," observed the S.M.

" Take any seafaring man and observe his hands when he is standing naturally," continued Courtney Mills. "In ninety per cent you find that instead of their palms touching the sides of their legs—as for instance those of a soldier when he's standing at attention—the backs of their hands are facing forward. Why? Because anyone who has to do much work at an oar develops a decided tendency to keep his hands in that position when his arms are hanging down. Test the proof of that on the next seaman you meet."

"Then what about this fellow's hands?"

"They're not horny and they haven't developed the peculiarity I mentioned. In fact, his fingers seem to be remarkably supple. As for his finger-prints——"

"Surely you haven't examined those?"

Courtney Mills smiled.

"No, I haven't," he admitted, "but I mean to get the Yard to do that for me. What do you think of this?"

He produced the photographic print he had handed to The Ferret a few minutes previously. Clearly visible on the emulsion were two separate impressions of the man's thumb.

"How did you manage that?" asked the S.M.

"Simple enough. I knew what to photograph. There was no need to ask him where it was taken; but I did want his finger-prints. I had previously moistened the emulsion slightly so that the moment he took the print—he couldn't very well refuse to do so—there was the clear impression. I took particular pains to replace the photograph carefully."

" I noticed that," observed Mr. Dangerfield.

" Then I hope 'Longshoreman Bill didn't," rejoined the Secret Service man drily. " Look here, Dangerfield, I'm off to-night, and perhaps to-morrow night. I don't want the boys to know, and I hope to be back each morning before they're up and about. If not, don't worry about my absence. To-night I'm off to Holyhead to post this print to headquarters by the night mail. I'll probably get a telegraphic report by noon."

" And then if The Yard should reply that 'Longshoreman Bill is a wrong 'un? Are you going to arrest him?"

Courtney Mills shook his head.

" No—not yet. I mean to give him more rope. If he is connected with this arms smuggling stunt he's ' some noise ', but not the Big Noise. It's the head of this organization I want to get hold of. More than likely he's a foreigner and is directing operations on a large scale. And, you see, as I mentioned to you before, the mere fact that there is an illegal export trade in arms isn't so important as the discovery of the source of supply."

" And—I hope you don't mind my asking—do you connect that with the theft of that case from the Admiralty car?"

" I really don't know. I've given the Yard all the particulars I have been able to find, and they're sending men up here to deal with the case. If, by a rare slice of luck, I can connect the attempt at Tin-y-went with our suspect, and eventually recover the contents of the Admiralty dispatch case, I'll give myself a very hearty pat on the back!"

"I hope you'll be able to do so," rejoined the S.M. heartily. "Hear those boys chattering? And it's half an hour since Lights Out. I'll have to go and tell them to shut up and go to sleep."

"Righto, I'll be off too. See you in the morning!"

It was the excitement of the day that was responsible for the Sea Scouts' disinclination to sleep. Usually they were so dog-tired after a long day either afloat or in the open ashore that they were sound in the arms of Morpheus almost as soon as they turned in.

Although Patrol Leader Hargreaves had not contributed to the chatter he was as wide awake as any. Alone in his tent, he lay on his camp-bed staring at the stars that were visible through the narrow gap in the tent flaps.

He was mentally reconstructing the scene of the "accident", and in retrospect the details seemed even more horrible than they had at the time.

It must have been well after midnight before he dozed, dimly conscious of a rising wind shaking the canvas of the tent. Then he fell sound asleep.

Suddenly a hand was laid upon his shoulder. He opened his eyes. There was a dim light inside the tent which must have been due to the moon.

Bending beside his cot, for the height of the tent was only four and a half feet, was a man—a stranger.

Somehow, Dick felt no apprehension. At first he was under the impression that the intruder was there by mistake. The idea that he was there with the object of stealing never entered the patrol leader's head.

"What do you want?" asked Hargreaves.

"You: I want to show you something. Come with me," replied the stranger. "Put on your things. It is cold to-night. I'll wait outside till you're ready."

"Are any of the other fellows coming?"

"No; you alone."

The urge was irresistible. Dick, strangely devoid of all sense of fear, acquiesced. It was unaccountable curiosity that prompted him to undertake this weird nocturnal excursion.

He dressed rapidly, putting on shorts, jersey and stockings. He debated whether to put on his boots, but decided upon his canvas shoes.

Then he wriggled past the tent-pole into the moonlight.

The stranger beckoned and set off at a steady pace. Dick followed.

It dawned upon him that the man was somewhat oddly attired, but he had noticed several queerly dressed people amongst the Anglesey countryfolk. This one was wearing loose canvas shorts, although they came a little below his knees and gave the appearance of skirts. His jacket was cut square at the waist, while the sleeves terminated in deep cuffs edged with braid. He sported a quaint three-cornered hat which failed to conceal a mop of reddish hair tied up in a short queue.

"Extraordinary chap!" thought the patrol leader. "I wonder what he wants to show me?"

His guide led the way along the ill-defined track across the rough sloping ground that terminated abruptly at the cliff-edge. Not once did he turn his head to see if the Sea Scout was following. He seemed to take it for granted that Dick would do so. And Dick did.

At about two hundred yards from the camp, the stranger turned abruptly to his right and left the path. It was hard going over ledges of serrated rocks where a " fault " due to volcanic action, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years ago, had violently disrupted the normal horizontal strata.

Then Dick's guide halted at the very edge of the headland and pointed.

The patrol leader knew where he was—almost abreast of the little island known as the East Rat, and where a hundred and fifty years or so ago the brig *Mary Jones* had met her doom.

To Hargreaves' surprise there was a vessel—a topsail schooner—gliding through the narrow deep-water channel between the East Rat and the cliffs. Her heavy rigging and the peculiar set of her main topsail proclaimed her to be no modern craft.

" She'll be aground in half a minute!" exclaimed Dick.

" Not she!" rejoined the stranger coolly. " She'll let go in a brace of shakes."

Even as he spoke the schooner let her headsheet fly. Down went her helm. Even in the wan moonlight the Patrol leader noticed that she was steered not by a wheel but by a long tiller. Then, even as she ran up into the wind and before she had actually lost way, the anchor was let go with a run.

Again Dick was astonished. There was no rattle of cable surging through the hawse-pipe. He distinctly heard and saw the splash as the anchor struck the surface, followed by a subdued roar.

It was the noise of hempen rope running out—and in all but very small boats hempen rope cables had been displaced by chain more than a century ago.

Quickly the sails were lowered, and loosely furled. A boat was swung out by means of tackles between the main and the fore lower-yards. Into her dropped four quaintly garbed seamen.

So far, not a word had been spoken. The orders, if any, had been given by signs; but as the boat was approaching the cliff immediately beneath the spot on which Dick and his stranger companion were standing, one of the crew gave a hail.

An answering shout came from somewhere at the base of the sheer cliff, followed by the eerie sounds of clanking chains and of heavy barrels being rolled over the rocky ground.

" So that's the secret of the noises of Haunted Harbour!" exclaimed Dick.

" Aye, youngster. You've hit that on the head, but you'll never get a chance to say aught of it to any mortal soul!" rejoined his companion.

It was a sinister warning, and so sudden that the patrol leader could do nothing against the onslaught.

Before he realized what was happening, Dick was seized round the waist by the muscular arms of his treacherous guide. And how strong those arms were!

The patrol leader gave an involuntary shriek as he found himself hurtling through the air towards the surf-swept rocks below.

" In another second I'll be a battered corpse!" was the thought that flashed through his mind.

Instinctively he extended his arms in a futile effort to save himself from the impact.

Then *whump!*

Dick opened his eyes, bewildered beyond measure by the fact that he was still alive. The left side of his face was pressed against the ground. It wasn't rock; it wasn't even seaweed, but grass—dry grass that tickled his nose. Then his hand came in contact with a smooth wooden post—one of the tent poles.

Realization came to him.

" Gosh! What a dream! Must have been that lobster we had for supper and 'Longshoreman Bill's yarn about Haunted Harbour!"

CHAPTER X

The Net Closes

In his drowsy state Dick made no immediate effort to get up. He lay with his face pressed to the dry grass of the floor of his tent and with his back hard against the upturned canvas cot from which his blankets had slipped in an untidy heap.

To his surprise he heard the faint sound of clanking chains and the rumble of rolling barrels almost as he had heard in his dream.

"Am I dreaming still?" he asked himself.

He raised his head. The noises ceased; but when he placed his ear to the ground again the sinister subterranean murmurings were unquestionably audible.

Again the flap of the tent was lifted aside and the dark figure of a human form appeared.

For an instant Dick felt dumbfounded. Was he in full possession of his faculties? Had the mysterious guide of his dream appeared in the flesh to summon him to witness again that nocturnal vision?

"What's wrong with you, old man?" inquired Jimmy Cotton's welcome voice.

"Dashed if I know exactly," replied the Patrol leader, sitting up and blinking at his chum. " I think I've fallen out of bed."

" There's no thinking about it—you have!" declared the Second with a laugh. " And you didn't half give a yell when you did! It's a wonder you didn't rouse the whole camp."

" And you would have, I guess, if you'd had the same dream as I had."

" Look what you had for supper, Dick——"

" Yes, I know; but that doesn't account for what happened after I woke up and found myself on the ground. Put your head down here and keep your ear close to the ground."

" What for?" asked Cotton, kneeling down on the place his chum had vacated.

" Listen and you'll hear," rejoined Hargreaves.

For nearly half a minute Jimmy assumed the posture of a praying mantis.

" Not a sound!" he declared. " You must have heard a train running into Camlytch station."

" But there aren't any during the night," objected Dick. " Let me listen again."

His attempt produced a negative result. He had to admit that the mysterious sounds were no longer audible.

" But they were," he added.

Jimmy gave another laugh—one of incredulity this time.

" Get back to bed, you silly blighter!" he exclaimed. " That's where I'm going. You're still muzzy after that lobster supper. Cheerio, and go to sleep or you'll be properly bat-eyed in the morning."

" But it was a strange dream, Jimmy. I'll tell you——"

" No you won't," interrupted the Second firmly. " At least not at this time of night. Spin the yarn in the morning—if you haven't forgotten all about it. That's usually the way with dreams. Good night!"

The Second went back to his tent, leaving Hargreaves to remake his bed.

Groping for the matches, the patrol leader lighted the candle and set to work. Having completed his task he again placed his ear close to the ground, almost hoping that he might hear those underground rumblings so as to convince himself that his dream had not been followed by a hallucination.

There was not a sound except for the crackling of the grass against his ear.

Going to the open door of his tent, Dick looked out. The moon was now on the point of setting. Grey dawn was stealing across the eastern sky. The breeze had died completely away. Far out in the bay a tramp steamer was heading westwards, her masthead, port and stern lights only just visible through the pale morning twilight. In the still air the steady rumble of her propeller could be distinctly though faintly heard.

" I wonder if that's the sound," he thought, as he returned to his bed.

When Mr. Dangerfield turned out, the cooks had already started the fires and three thin columns of smoke rose almost vertically in the still air.

He glanced at Courtney Mills's tent. The flap was closed. Without opening it there was no means of telling whether the Secret Service man had returned from his nocturnal investigations.

" Hello, early bird!" he exclaimed, catching sight of Dick Hargreaves. " What's the reason? The Otters are not providing the cooks for the day, you know. . . . I say, what's the matter with you?"

" Nothing, sir."

" Nothing? You look washed out, Dick. I'll have to give you a dose of medicine or else send you over to Dr. Morgan."

" I'm quite all right, really, sir," protested the patrol leader.

" You ought to know best," said Mr. Dangerfield dubiously. " I must say you don't look at all up to the mark. Come along to my tent after breakfast."

" Morning, Dangerfield!"

The S.M. swung round. The Secret Service man, looking as bright as a button, had just emerged from his tent.

" Morning, Mills! I was wondering what had become of you."

" Been sound asleep since three o'clock," exclaimed Courtney. " There was nothing doing! I hung about in that old shanty opposite the pub from closing time till well after two o'clock. It—the pub, I mean—seemed to be the acme of well-ordered respectability. However, one can't go by appearances, so I'll have another few hours' observation to-night. And I'm hoping to receive a report on Bill the 'Longshoreman's fingerprints from The Yard before then. What are you doing to-day?"

" Sailing and pulling boats exercise in the bay. Care to come along?"

" Wish I could," replied Courtney with genuine wistfulness. " I daren't leave the camp in case a telegram arrives. I may have a chance of a little talk with friend Bill the 'Longshoreman."

" You have your doubts, then?"

The Scotland Yard official shrugged his shoulders.

" I'm rather hoping that doubts will become certainties."

" On what fresh ground?"

" I'll tell you before ' lights out ' to-night," declared Mills.

The Sea Scouts spent an enjoyable forenoon afloat, but somewhat to Hargreaves' disappointment the S.M. ordered the sailing boats to make a beat to wind-'ard and then a dead run home. Since the breeze was nor'-easterly this took the boats in the opposite direction to the East Rat, so that the patrol leader had no opportunity of examining the spot where he might find the cave of his dream.

Contrary to Jimmy Cotton's statement, that dream did remain fresh in Dick's memory. He made up his mind to obtain his S.M.'s permission either to borrow the dinghy or else make an expedition afoot to the place. And because he did not like to run the risk of being laughed at by his chums he decided to go alone.

When the Sea Scouts returned and beached their boats in the sandy cove, Mr. Dangerfield was met by the Secret Service man.

" Wire came an hour ago," announced the latter.

" Smart work at The Yard, since my letter didn't arrive until first post this morning, and they've thousands of finger-print records to deal with. The original wire won't be of much use to you because it is mostly in code. Here's the transcript: ' Abraham Moss, alias Matthew Dobson, alias Peter the Penman. Born Cardiff, 1st May, 1899. Joined Royal Navy, May 1918, deserted, April 1919. Given 90 days detention by Court Martial in H.M.S. *Victory* at Portsmouth, January 1920 "—so you see it took them eight months to recover the deserter. ' Exeter Assizes, Michaelmas, 1922: two years' hard labour for forging and uttering counterfeit coin; York Assizes, Hilary Term, 1927: three years' penal servitude for house-breaking with violence. At expiration of ticket-of-leave all traces of this man were lost. Believed to have shipped as a seaman and to have deserted in a North American port.' Nice record, isn't it?"

" I suppose there's no doubt about the finger-print examination?"

" Practically none," replied Courtney Mills. " The risk of such an error is about one in ten thousand. No; there's no doubt about it; Bill the 'Longshoreman is for it."

" Are you going to arrest him?" asked the S.M.

" Not yet," replied The Yard man. " You remember you suggested that he should be warned off the camp. Dash it! I nearly said ' warned off the course '! On the contrary, if you've no objection, I'd rather he were encouraged to put in a little more time here. Then on the day after to-morrow—or rather the evening of that day—I'm looking forward to a general round up. Two of my staff are coming down here from The Yard and I'd like the co-operation of your Sea Scouts. Bill isn't playing a lone hand. I think I've spotted most of the gang; but the trouble is that when they're caught they won't squeal. So that is why I'm off to-night in the hope of tracing the source of the supply."

"What supply?"

"Arms and ammunition. I'm positively certain that consignments have been shipped and will be attempted to be shipped from Haunted Harbour!"

"Sounds thrilling!"

"Thrilling won't be the word for it!" rejoined Courtney Mills with animation. "I may be late back to camp to-morrow morning. If I'm not in by noon I'd be greatly obliged if you would send this telegram—it's in code, you see—to The Yard."

"You think there's danger, then?"

"Danger? Of course. Our job wouldn't be worth much without the element of danger, and in our line we come up against it at all odd moments when least expected. Yes, I'll try to take good care of myself, Dangerfield!"

CHAPTER XI

Baulked!

Shortly after eleven o'clock, when the camp had settled down for the night, Courtney Mills emerged from his tent.

He had discarded his Scoutmaster's rig and was wearing a lounge suit of dark material and a soft cap. Round his neck was loosely tied a dark grey scarf of thin texture with which, if occasion required, he could cover his face without hindering his breathing. In his pocket he carried a pair of dark gloves, also for the purpose of reducing his visibility in the darkness.

True to the traditions of The Yard, he was unarmed. Except in very exceptional circumstances the British police, both uniformed and plain-clothes men, are distinctly prejudiced against the use of firearms for self-protection; while on the other hand criminals in this country, who might resort to violence to avoid capture, refrain from using lethal weapons, either out of a strange sense of chivalry or for fear of the consequences to themselves if they find themselves in the clutches of the law.

Throughout his career at New Scotland Yard Courtney Mills had never handled either a revolver or an automatic except at the range in the basement of headquarters. He had been in more than one " rough-and-tumble ", but in every case he had relied upon physical strength combined with a scientific knowledge of how to apply that strength to the best advantage—as not a few " toughs " had learnt to their cost.

He did, however, carry a pair of " bracelets ". At first thought one might wonder what use one pair of handcuffs would be when tackling three suspects. Mills had once solved that problem first by flooring three hefty opponents in a seemingly unequal fight and then handcuffing them together until help arrived to convey them to the station.

But the Secret Service man had no intention of arresting anybody that night.

Stealthily he left the camp, crossed a shelving stretch of rough ground crowned by a ruined windmill, thence by an unfenced path strewn with broken glass, until he reached the head of Haunted Harbour. There was another means of getting across to the other side, by the tall dock-gates, but these were generally left open, allowing the harbour itself to dry out at each successive low tide.

There was no one about as Courtney Mills approached a row of tumble-down stone cottages. Roofless dwellings and gaping walls, even in the darkness, gave the impression of a village on the Western Front after a strafe, but before an intensive bombardment had reduced it to a heap of ruins.

He was sure of his ground. Three or four visits both by day and by night had made him almost as familiar with the locality as he was with Trafalgar Square. Unhesitatingly yet cautiously he crept through a paneless window and entered one of the derelict houses. From there he could command a view of the Faucet Inn, which was now shrouded in darkness. Ostensibly, the last of its patrons had departed and the landlord had retired for the night.

The inn was not immediately facing Courtney Mills's lair, but was across the narrow street and a little to his left front. Directly opposite the harbour hostelry, and running past the side of the ruined cottage, was a sort of lane, into which a lorry had been backed when young Hargreaves on his belated way to camp had scattered a crowd of pardonably angry inhabitants of Camlytch.

A short distance in the rear of the row of cottages was the upper part of the harbour, with high unguarded quays that seemed to harmonize with the general air of desolation. Further away and silhouetted against the starlit sky could be discerned the gaunt outline of the ruined mill and its adjacent buildings—that No Man's Land where no inhabitant of Camlytch would venture after dark. The legend of Haunted Harbour, of which 'Longshoreman Bill, otherwise The Ferret, had given the Sea Scouts a generally accepted version, was too great a deterrent!

The hour of midnight passed. Mills shifted his position ever so slightly to ward off a possible attack of cramp.

One o'clock by the dial of his luminous wrist-watch, which, when not required, reposed in his trousers' pocket. Nothing of a suspicious nature occurred so far. He was beginning to think that he was spending another unprofitable night when he might be sleeping comfortably in his camp-bed.

Suddenly he heard the sound of an approaching motor. He stiffened. No law-abiding concern would have occasion to send a motor vehicle—or any other type of vehicle—to this semi-deserted district of Camlytch Port at this hour of night.

A few seconds later and the lorry, covered with a tarpaulin, drove past. Its engine was so perfectly silenced and smooth-running that he had entirely misjudged its distance when first he heard its approach.

It stopped and then, restarting, drove into the narrow passageway facing the inn.

Although he could not now see the vehicle he judged by the sounds that two men had alighted. One remained by the lorry. The other, coming into the watcher's range of vision, tapped softly upon the fast closed door of the Faucet Inn.

There was a slight delay before the massive oak door creaked on its hinges.

A husky conversation took place, then, like wraiths, four muffled men emerged and joined the lorry-driver.

"This'll be the last you'll get for some time," declared the latter. "There's trouble at the works and our boss has had to go slow."

"That don't matter overmuch," replied one of the men from the inn. "We've too much as it is, seeing we've pulled off the other job. The yacht'll be in the bay to-morrow now the pilot cutter's off his station. Going back to Brum?"

" Yes, soon as we get this little lot off our hands. Look lively, you chaps."

The party disappeared from Mills's view. There came a slight scraping sound and presently two of them carried what looked like a long canvas-packed cylinder into the inn. Four more similar consignments followed, and then the whole party went into the pub, presumably for the purpose of giving the lorry-driver and his mate drinks before their long return journey.

They were bound for Birmingham! The detective had made that important discovery. But where in Birmingham? Presumably to the factory where the arms were illegally manufactured to be smuggled out of the country and eventually sold to some semi-civilized nation at an " incredibly high profit ", especially to the distributors.

Now came the important problem. Should he conceal himself in or even under the now unattended vehicle and let himself be carried to the source of the arms-traffickers' supply? It would mean a long, arduous journey, and take him a hundred or more miles from Haunted Harbour to the centre of England.

With reasonable luck he ought to be in Birmingham soon after eight o'clock, slipping off the lorry before it actually entered the premises to which it belonged. He could then make a note of the place and telephone to The Yard to send men with search warrants. That done, he could hire a fast car to bring him back to Haunted Harbour to complete the final closing of the net.

It was now or never.

Creeping to the back of the cottage, whence he could see the stationary vehicle and make sure that it was unattended, Mills scaled the low wall.

Cautiously looking over the side of the lorry he discovered that the tailboard was down and the tarpaulin had been roughly folded into four and thrown upon the floor. One end rested against the side of the lorry, leaving a space into which he could crawl and hide. True, it was unpleasantly close to the cab in which the driver and his mate would be seated, but its shelter would be far preferable to a precarious perch under the body of the vehicle. Even so, he anticipated an uncomfortable journey, with its attendant penalties in the shape of bumps and bruises.

Noiselessly he swung himself up and crept into his place of concealment. The heavy folded canvas was so stiff that it gave no indication of the bulge of the body; while, being about nine feet in length, it afforded a generous overlap at each end.

There he lay for about ten minutes before he heard the inn door creak on its hinges. Even those ten minutes had cramped his limbs, but he consoled himself that once the lorry was in motion the jolting would prove an effectual antidote to other stiffness set up by bodily inaction.

" Start her up, Bill!" commanded the driver to his mate. " We've got enough juice to get her home. Righto, she won't kick!"

The engine fired at the first swing. Again Mills was struck by the comparative noiselessness of the motor and the absence of vibration in the chassis.

The lorry started with hardly a jerk. The long journey back to Birmingham had begun.

But before the lorry had gone a couple of hundred yards it halted.

" All serene?" asked the driver.

" Yes; not a soul about," was the reply—the voice of a *third* man. " I'll get in behind and p'raps I'll get a few winks on the way. How about Tom? He could do with a nap too."

" So could I, if it comes to that," rejoined the first speaker. " But get in with Joe, Tom, if you've a mind to."

Courtney Mills realized that he was now in a pretty tight corner. In spite of his careful thinking-out of the possible situation he had omitted to take into consideration the fact that a third member of the lorry's crew had been dropped at some distance from the inn to give warning in the unlikely event of anyone going down to Haunted Harbour at that hour of the night—anyone not connected with the gang.

And now two of the men were about to climb into the body of the lorry with the idea of sleeping on the way. Almost certainly they would make use of the tarpaulin both as a cover and as something to mitigate the hardness of the bare boards.

He was not long left in suspense.

" 'Ere, wot's this?" demanded Tom, lifting the corner of the tarpaulin that covered the Secret Service man's feet.

This was decidedly disadvantageous, since the layers of the stiff canvas pressed heavily upon Courtney's head and body.

Having been detected he struggled to extricate himself.

" 'Ere, George!" yelled Tom to the driver. " Bear a hand, quick. There's a strange bloke here."

Somehow the detective managed to free himself from the tarpaulin.

" I'm a police-officer and——"

" Are you?" rejoined Tom with an oath. " Then take that!"

He aimed a furious blow with his fist. Had it taken effect Mills would have been knocked out.

Side-stepping in that narrow space he avoided the blow and countered by a scientifically planted left that would have settled Tom's hash but for one thing.

The detective's feet tripped in the tarpaulin. Before he could recover his balance, Tom and Joe closed with him. A terrific struggle ensued, the combatants swaying to and fro in momentary peril of toppling over the side of the lorry on to the hard road.

Although hampered by the cramped condition—with plenty of elbow-room and by avoiding in-fighting Courtney would have more than held his own—the Secret Service man put up a stiff fight. Again and again he got in blows that would have knocked out any ordinary man; but these fellows were as tough as nails and knew that defeat would not end there, as far as they were concerned. They were fighting for subsequent liberty even as their antagonist was fighting for his immediate freedom.

It was the lorry-driver who settled the business. Armed with a truncheon, he climbed over the tail-board and waited his opportunity. It was worse than useless to strike on the off-chance of "socking" his chums' adversary; and in the dim light he might easily make a disastrous mistake—disastrous both to his fellows and himself!

Then came his opportunity. Tom had thrown both arms round the detective's waist, while Mills had just broken away from an arm-lock. His head and shoulders drew clear of the *mêlée.*

The driver brought the truncheon down on Courtney Mills's unprotected head with a thud.

The detective never knew who had hit him, nor did he feel the impact.

He crumpled up inertly, still in the grip of his well-nigh exhausted and battered antagonists.

CHAPTER XII

The Prison in the Ruined Mill

"Now what's to be done?" asked Joe, between deep-drawn gasps.

"He said he was a cop."

"A tec."

"Yuss."

"Take him a few miles and then pitch him out into a ditch."

"Wot then? When he comes to he'll get busy. Let's run him back to the pub. The boys'll know how to stop him squealing."

"I'm of two minds whether to stop him squealing now," observed Joe menacingly, as he mopped the blood flowing from a rapidly closing eye.

"None o' that!" snapped the lorry-driver. "We'll run him back to the Faucet. If The Ferret likes to do him in then, that's no business of ours. We'll be away out of it in ten minutes."

The lorry backed and retraced its way, one of the men remaining with the unconscious detective in case the latter might regain consciousness.

A long parley ensued at the inn door. Old William, the innkeeper, didn't take kindly to the idea that the unconscious 'tec—who might be dead, for all he knew—should be received into his hostelry. There was much too great a risk.

" Where's The Ferret and the others, then?" asked the driver.

" Gone."

" Well, you know how to get hold of them. . . . Bring him in, boys."

The still protesting William was brushed aside. The two men, carrying their victim by his head and heels, deposited him without ceremony upon the sawdust-covered stone floor of the bar. Then, having demanded another drink—" just to pull ourselves together "—they went out and drove off, leaving the innkeeper alone with the unconscious Secret Service man.

Shivering so that the lighted candle he was holding shed warm grease over the floor, William went to the back of the low bar. Here he knelt down and lifted one of the flags, revealing a yawning hole and the upper part of a ladder.

Below was a large cellar where the gang met to discuss their plans. It was empty and in darkness.

That meant that Old William would have to go in search of them—a task that filled him with superstitious dread—along the secret passage leading under Haunted Harbour to the cave in which the smuggled arms and munitions were awaiting shipment.

Slowly descending the ladder, Old William crossed the cellar floor to a blackened oak door. As he half-expected, it was bolted on the outside.

There he was, alone in the inn with the unconscious body of a representative of the law. Dare he settle the business and drop the corpse into the cellar, leaving no clue to the detective's disappearance? Or were there any clues already?

He was still thinking about what he ought to do when the rasping of bolts echoed through the cellar.

The tunnel door swung back and The Ferret appeared.

" Hello, William; what are you doing here?" he demanded suspiciously.

" Trying to find you, look you!" replied the Welshman in a high reedy voice. " George has come back and left a policeman, whateffer!"

" A policeman?"

" Yes! In the bar, lack-a-day! He's dead to the world. I'm scared, so I came to see if you were down in the cellar."

" And left him there. You blithering idiot! Supposing he recovers and gets away?"

Waiting to blow a warning blast on a whistle—the noise of which would travel along the subterranean tunnel and summon the rest of the gang—Redpole swarmed up the ladder. In the dark bar-room he stumbled over Mills's limp form.

" Where's that light?" he called. " Hurry up with the candle!"

He did not wait for the innkeeper to rejoin him. Snatching the candlestick as soon as William's head and shoulders appeared above the floor-level, he held the light in front of the Secret Service man's face.

Then he placed the tip of his little finger against the unconscious man's wide-open eye. There was no responsive twitch.

" So you're a 'tec, are you?" he gloated. " You're the fellow who tried to pass yourself off as a Scoutmaster, eh? Well, you've overreached yourself this time, my man. I'll take the liberty of finding out who you really are."

Methodically he went through the victim's pockets, beginning with the inside coat one. Here was a pocket-book in which he discovered the unconscious officer's warrant case.

" Ah! Courtney Mills, of New Scotland Yard! I've heard of you. Pity I hadn't seen you before you came to Camlytch. . . . Fifteen pounds in notes: h'm, that's his, so I won't relieve him of that . . . hip-pocket—no gun. These fellows don't carry one, as a rule. If he had he mightn't have been here. Hello! Darbies! They'll come in useful!"

He slipped the handcuffs into his pocket just as the first of the gang arrived upon the scene.

" Who've you got there?" demanded the newcomer.

" Yard man," replied The Ferret briefly.

" Aw!"

" You can well say ' Aw '," snapped Redpole. " It means they've got wind of what's going on, or they wouldn't have sent a Scotland Yard man to Haunted Harbour. It means we'll have to get a move on, send the stuff off to the yacht and make ourselves scarce within twenty-four hours. I can keep this bright lad quiet till then."

"Where, how?"

"We can't leave him here. We'll carry him to the old mill. When he comes to himself we'll give him some grub and water and then gag him. I'll drop a line to the Camlytch police. They'll get it first post to-morrow, and then they can let him loose. By that time we'll be well away out of it."

They had no difficulty in lowering Courtney Mills down into the cellar. The opening was large enough to admit a fifty-gallon barrel. Several such barrels had already been lowered, but they contained, not beer, but rifle and machine-gun ammunition.

"Close the slab and don't forget to sprinkle fresh sand on the floor before you go to bed, William," was The Ferret's parting injunction. "You'll only have yourself to blame if the narks find the slab. We won't be here."

"But the money you promised me, look you?" faltered the innkeeper.

"Whistle for it!" replied The Ferret, as he disappeared down the ladder.

He considered that he was perfectly safe in "bilking" Old William. The innkeeper had been over-grasping. There was no fear of his "giving the show away", he was too deeply implicated in the illegal business.

But Redpole had made another error.

The men carrying the unconscious detective stopped and laid down their burden on the cellar floor.

"Come on, don't waste time," urged The Ferret.

"Like as not you'll treat us the same as Old Will'm

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when we've finished the job," said one of the men, with unmistakable bluntness. " Twenty pun a-piece is owin' us. There be seven of us, look you!"

" You'll have it sent to you by post. I told you that before."

" So you did, but who's to know it's all square?"

" Hang it all! Do you think I'm a walking bank?"

" Well, let's see what you have got on you," said the local gangster stubbornly. " ' Bird in hand's worth two in the bush '. What say you, mates?"

It was a decided impasse. The men had threatened to strike just when they were most badly needed. The Ferret had been provided with ready money by Michael Apulgrab for the express purpose of paying the smugglers. Although some remote strain of honour had prevented him from plundering Courtney Mills he had no qualms about swindling the men who had assisted him in the present enterprise.

He had completely misunderstood the mentality of these Camlytch men. He had had little difficulty in enlisting their services. They seemed most docile, yet intelligent in carrying out the nocturnal task of transporting the arms and ammunition from the Inn to the secret cave. They had been quite content to receive " earnest money ", with a promise of more to come when the job was completed.

And now, through a hasty retort to the innkeeper, he had destroyed their confidence.

There was no help for it. Even though the terms of their engagement were not completed, he must pay.

Standing with the unconscious body of the Secret

Service man between him and his helpers, Redpole handed out forty five-pound notes—notes that he hoped would be his.

" 'Nother fiver for Old Will'm," suggested the spokesman.

" Aye, why not a tenner?" asked another.

Hurriedly The Ferret produced five one-pound notes. He was beginning to wonder if, after all, he oughtn't to make Courtney Mills contribute towards this outlay, since the Scotland Yard man was at the bottom of the trouble.

" And now, I suppose, you think you're going to slack?" demanded Redpole, assuming his tone of authority once more. " Don't make any mistake! The Boss has safeguarded himself and me against that sort of thing! You wouldn't like to be put away and given a stretch in Beaumaris Jail. . . . Look lively there!"

The men, their terms settled, yet cowed by Redpole's threat, again lifted the seemingly inanimate body. Preceded by one of their number carrying a lantern, they entered the tunnel.

Pausing to shut and bolt the ancient, massive iron-bound oaken door, The Ferret brought up the rear of the procession, assisting their progress by means of his powerful electric torch.

For the first fifty yards the tunnel, driven through the solid rock, descended gradually. Then its gradient was hardly perceptibly upward. Here it was passing underneath the upper part of the tidal Haunted Harbour. The tide was now at half flood and, driven in by a stiff northerly wind, the breakers were rolling over the rocky bottom only a few feet above the men's heads. A hollow booming sound alternately rising and falling in volume echoed and re-echoed through the tunnel.

Its jealously guarded secret had been known to generations and generations of Camlytch smugglers. No doubt it had been in existence when Edward I showed his infant son to the conquered Welshmen at Carnarvon Castle as the first alien Prince of Wales; perhaps it was known to the Druids who in the Isle of Anglesey were the last of their kind to defy the legions of ancient Rome.

Beyond the sinister-named harbour the tunnel rose with considerable steepness. Here and there the slippery incline was broken by a few deeply worn steps. Then it widened into a cave, also of artificial origin.

" Stop!" ordered The Ferret.

The bearers deposited the detective's body on the ground and, stretching their arms, awaited developments.

" We'll put him in the Old Mill," decided Redpole. " See the coast is clear, Taff; and heaven help you if you leave me in the lurch a second time!"

The Welshman, throwing off his coat, began to ascend the wall of the cave by means of irons driven into the solid rock and hardly discernible in the lantern light. When his head was almost touching the roof he cautiously pushed open a flap, disclosing a vertical shaft to which was affixed an iron ladder.

Twenty feet or so above he opened another flap, this time of metal covered with a layer of dried twigs, and peered rather timorously into the darkness.

The mill was deserted. Every member of the gang would have been astounded had it been otherwise as far as human beings were concerned; although they would not be surprised if they encountered the wraiths of the murdered crew of the *Mary Jones* and of the wreckers who sent them to their doom.

Taff climbed through the aperture and gained the floor of the mill, his feet crushing the deposit of brushwood as he did so.

" All clear!" he whispered.

" Two of you—you two—up you go," ordered The Ferret. " Where's the rope?"

No one replied.

They had left it in the cellar.

" Blockheads!" rasped The Ferret. " Off you go, Jones, and fetch me one from the cave. Tell Amos we'll be along in a quarter of an hour."

It was a good four hundred yards from the point to the secret cave and it took the messenger some time to fetch the required coil of three-inch rope.

One end of this was carried up to the aperture in the wall. The other, with a bowline-on-the-bight, was secured to Courtney's body.

Guided by a man on the ladder, the unconscious prisoner was hauled up the shaft. The rest of the gang followed.

It was not Redpole's intention to leave the Secret Service man in the room at the bottom of the ruined building. By day it was an object of interest to visitors; children played around the gaunt structure. No one, however, ventured to the upper stories, which were not only ladderless but were in a ruinous condition.

Massive beams formed the joists of what had once been a floor. More than half of each of the three floors had disappeared, leaving semi-circular platforms, inaccessible in ordinary circumstances and serving as screens from inquisitive eyes below.

The absence of a ladder was of little consequence to the smugglers. The rope, weighted by a piece of stone, was thrown over one of the exposed beams and allowed to " render " until both parts touched the ground.

Up swarmed Taff, hand over hand, until he reached the second story. Another man followed and between them they hauled Courtney Mills to his improvised prison, thirty feet above the ground.

Overhead, through the roofless circular aperture, scudding clouds across the faintly moonlit sky gave the impression that the ruin was actually toppling. Through the rectangle that once had been a window the in-shore breeze moaned to the accompaniment of a mournful tap-tap-tap caused by a loose sheet of rusty galvanized iron.

Following his prisoner, The Ferret climbed up the rope and rejoined his two men. A brief examination told him that the victim's heart was still beating strongly.

" That's one advantage of having a thick skull," he remarked in an attempt at jocularity. " We don't want him to break his neck by falling down when he recovers his senses, so I'll see that he doesn't."

With that he secured Courtney's wrists behind his back, using the Secret Service man's handcuffs for the purpose. Next he lashed his ankles, and to make additionally sure, brought the end of the rope to a ring let into the wall. Unless this rope were cut through or unlashed—and the ring was too high for the manacled hands of his prisoner to reach it—it was impossible for Courtney to get to the window, the sill of which was about three feet from the floor.

To complete his task Redpole inserted a gag and bound it to his victim's head by the latter's scarf—the same scarf that he had worn for the purpose of making himself invisible in the darkness.

The Ferret did this part of the business carefully. He had no wish for The Yard official to die through suffocation, or by any other means, if it came to that. All he wanted was to ensure that Courtney could not raise the alarm until the case containing the KI and the cargo of munitions were safely aboard *Katharina.*

That should be an easy task. The operation was planned to be carried out in broad daylight. The pilot cutter was away, so what would be simpler than to load up the smugglers' motor-boat in the cave, cover the casks with nets and sails and then make boldly for the yacht. She was visiting Camlytch Bay for the last time in connexion with this illegal traffic, and no doubt with the proceeds of the transaction, together with the huge sum Michael Apulgrab hoped to obtain from a foreign government in return for the case containing the mysterious KI, he would be able to retire from business and live the life of a gentleman of leisure in some foreign country, where his antecedents and previous history would not be taken into consideration.

And The Ferret would go with him, battening upon his employer's ill-gotten gains.

At least, he imagined so!

CHAPTER XIII

The Bandits' Cave

Next morning the Otters were told off for camp duties. Amongst other tasks they had to provide cooks and camp orderlies under the supervision either of the patrol leader or the Second.

Since the Otters could be relied upon, Dick Hargreaves had no difficulty in obtaining permission to spend the forenoon in "Lone Scouting", leaving Jimmy Cotton in charge of the camp.

Now was Dick's opportunity to carry out his intention of visiting the site of his vivid dream. If anyone had asked him the reason for his wish it is doubtful whether he could have given the answer. It was simply an urge—a wish to see the place that, so far, had existed only in his dream, and to find out if there was such a place and whether it looked the same as when he stood on the edge of the cliff with his mysterious guide and treacherous assailant.

He followed the footpath, as he had often done. It was a fine morning. The on-shore wind had died down soon after sunrise. The tide was almost out. Not a vessel was to be seen, although there were trails of smoke on the horizon.

Once he chanced to look back. The tents were hidden by an intervening rise. Only the gaunt ruined mill showed above the skyline on the landward side; otherwise there were no signs of man's handiwork. He might have been exploring a desert island.

Presently Dick came to the place where, in his dream, he had turned aside from the path. How familiar it looked. He recognized some of the boulders even though it was now broad daylight.

Fifty yards brought him to the edge of the cliff. Yes, there was the ledge on which he had stood when he found himself being hurled into space. He gave a slight shudder. How real it had seemed!

Something prompted him to lie at full length and look down over the cliff. The rock on which he stood was solid enough. There was no risk of its becoming detached.

Dick had a good head for heights. Dizziness never bothered him, even when working aloft in one of the Sea Scouts' craft or looking over the side of the cockpit of an aeroplane thousands of feet above the earth's surface.

To his surprise, he discovered the end of a massive iron crowbar driven deeply into a crevice less than a foot below the edge of the cliff. More than that: there was an almost new rope-ladder made fast to it.

What the Patrol leader ought to have done was to return to camp and tell Mr. Dangerfield of his discovery, or if the Scoutmaster were not to be found, to bring along some of the other fellows to stand by.

But Dick regarded the discovery of the rope ladder as a heaven-sent opportunity to see whether there was a cave into which the survivors of the *Mary Jones* had been cast. The presence of the means of descent might be accounted for by the fact that the local fishermen, when unable to put to sea, frequently were lowered over the cliffs at low tide to examine the onshore crab and lobster pots. He didn't suppose the fishermen—most of whom he knew—would mind if he used their ladder.

It was a tricky business lying at full length and lowering himself over the brink until his feet found the topmost rung. After that the descent was fairly simple, except that the ladder would sway inward under his weight until he felt like a fly walking on the ceiling!

He hadn't realized how the edge of the cliff overhung. Viewed from above, when half-way down, it looked as if that enormous mass of rock was on the point of breaking away; but the patrol leader took courage in the knowledge that it had been there for ages and would probably be there for many years to come.

Presently his rubber-soled shoes touched the ground—if a slightly shelving ledge covered with slippery seaweed could be thus designated.

In one direction the ledge led nowhere. It diminished in width till it terminated in the sheer face of the cliff. In the other, however, it wound round a bold spur. Here and there the seaweed had been removed, exposing the smooth rock, now dry in spite of being in the shade of the cliff. It was about six feet above low-water mark. Dick reckoned that it would be two hours after low water before the ledge would be covered. That would give him plenty of time, especially as the ebb had yet about twenty minutes to go.

Making his way cautiously along the slippery path—for he knew the hazards of wearing rubber shoes when walking over wet seaweed—Dick rounded the projecting spur. Beyond, but quite invisible from the top of the cliff, was a narrow half-tide channel running into a cave, the entrance to which was concealed, when viewed from seaward, by a steeply shelving ledge of rock.

Lying aground, with a slight list to starboard, was a motor-boat. The patrol leader judged her to be between eighteen and twenty feet in length; her bows were decked-in; the engine was well for'ard and separated from the stern-sheets by a bulkhead. The whole of the space aft was filled with barrels and canvas-wrapped packages, partly hidden by a loosely placed tanned sail.

Barrels! Dick's thoughts flew back to those strange sounds he had heard in the night—the rumbling of what seemed to be heavy casks. And were not the men handling barrels when on his first arrival at the camp he had very nearly added to the list of road casualties? Obviously the cargo was not of that nature generally handled by the local fishermen. Equally obvious was it that the motor-boat had been stealthily loaded, and her crew were awaiting the flood tide to get her afloat.

He had stumbled upon the secret cave of the arms' smugglers and was on the point of solving the problem that, so far as he knew, had baffled the wits of Courtney Mills!

Having made this discovery, he ought to have gone back to the camp and informed the Secret Service man. Then he remembered that Courtney Mills was not in his tent. Quite possibly he had gone off on one of his lone expeditions in search of evidence.

So, against all dictates of caution, Hargreaves formed a resolution to explore the cave alone.

" If there's anyone inside and there looks like being a row, I can run for it," he decided. " I've a cleaner pairs of heels than any of the local people I've met yet."

Just inside the mouth of the cave he stopped and listened intently. It also allowed his eyes to grow accustomed to the semi-darkness.

From the dim recesses of the cavern came the sound of voices. Evidently the gang—for such Dick was fully convinced they were—had not taken the precaution of placing a man on guard at the entrance. A sense of false security had lulled them into a state of carelessness.

By degrees the patrol leader could take in his surroundings with steadily increasing clearness. The natural dock ended some thirty feet from the entrance, beyond which the cave diminished both in width and height.

Along this natural tunnel Dick made his way, keeping a wary eye and straining his ears to catch what the men were saying.

They were still too far away for the conversation to be audible. He continued his approach until he reached a shallow cavity in the side of the passage.

From here he could see into the main cave, only about a dozen yards away. It was lofty and at least thirty feet in width. Some barrels were ranged along one side; in the centre was a rough table set upon upturned casks. Around it were seated five men whom the patrol leader failed to recognize as living in Camlytch Port. Mugs of beer stood on the table, in the centre of which was a small, flat, dull-metal object.

From the description given him by Courtney Mills Dick knew that it was the case containing the stolen KI.

"How much longer is The Ferret going to be?" asked one of the men.

"He'll be here in time, don't you worry yourself. The boat ain't afloat yet, and we ain't going to swot our bloomin' insides out getting her off afore the flood lifts her."

"Any signs of the yacht?"

"Taff sent down to say he'd sighted her well in the offing. Stands to reason the Boss won't close the land a moment sooner than necessary. It's tip and run this lay, mate."

"Wot about they perishin' Welshmen?" inquired another. "Are they goin' aboard?"

"They?" rejoined a red-bearded man contemptuously. "They? No bloomin' fear. I reckon The Ferret'll let 'em stew in their own juice once the last of the cargo gets away. Only last night he says to me as how he meant to welsh the Welshmen, and, from wot I know of him, he'll do it. . . . Hello! What's up now?"

The men turned their heads and looked in the opposite direction from the place where Dick was concealed. Some of them rose to their feet.

Coming along a tunnel leading inland from the main cave was another of the gang. He was carrying a lantern and looked very much out of breath.

" Aeroplane!" he announced. " Aeroplane just landed close to they Scouts! I reckon they're lookin' for the 'tec we collared last night!"

Listening, Dick did not connect the statement with Courtney Mills. He wondered who the prisoner might be. Perhaps one of the pair who, he knew, had been sent from New Scotland Yard to investigate the affair when the Admiralty car was ambushed and the case containing the KI was stolen.

Howls of rage came from the assembled gang. An aeroplane—that swiftly moving menace of the air, spreading terror into the minds of road bandits and others of that ilk—would upset all their plans. The *Katharina*, for instance, would " smell a rat " and put out to sea again, leaving the shore gang stranded. Even for the sake of gaining possession of the secret KI, Michael Apulgrab would not run the risk of closing and picking up the still stranded motor-boat.

Some of the ruffianly crew started to make for the entrance of the cave, but the red-bearded man called them back.

" You won't see her up there," he declared. " Come along to the Old Mill. We'll see what she's doing from there without being spotted!"

It was a close shave for the watching Sea Scout. The foremost of the men stopped within two yards of him, and for the moment Dick was on the point of bolting.

The whole crowd stopped and retraced their steps, disappearing from view along a tunnel which, as they had unsuspectingly told the unseen listener, led to the Old Mill.

In their eagerness to see what the aeroplane was doing they left the metal case on the table.

Now was the patrol leader's chance. Hardly realizing his good fortune, he stole into the main cave and seized the much-debated object.

Even as he raised it from the board an electric bell rang shrilly. The alarm was a device of The Ferret's to ensure that it was not handled by any of the gang. It was not only that he doubted the truth of the maxim " honour amongst thieves ", all the time it had been in his possession he was obsessed by the idea that its contents were in the nature of an infernal machine and that any rough or careless handling might result in a catastrophe.

Dick took to his heels, holding the case tightly. Already the gang, warned by the continuous and insistent clanging of the bell, were on their way back to the cave.

For a moment they stood staring at the table.

" It's gone!" yelled Redbeard.

" Who was there to take the thing?" demanded another.

" How do I know. It's been pinched. Someone's nosed his way into the place, and he could only get in from seaward. After him, lads!"

The delay had enabled Dick to gain the ladder in spite of sprawling headforemost on the slippery kelp. He very nearly lost the metal case, and barked his shins as he did so.

Transferring his prize to the hip-pocket of his shorts, the patrol leader swarmed up the swaying ladder. He gained the top of the cliff just as the foremost of his pursuers sprang for the rungs.

Out came the Sea Scout's sheath-knife. Two slashes with the keen blade severed the ropes. The ladder, with one of the rogues on it, clattered on to the rocks beneath.

Leaving the discomfited gang to quarrel furiously amongst themselves as to who was to blame for leaving the rope ladder and not guarding the mouth of the cave, Dick, slowing down to a jog-trot, headed back for camp.

He was in high spirits. Single-handed he had regained the metal case and its precious contents from the bandits. It was something to be proud of. If ever a fellow had cause to be greatly bucked, it was he!

But before he had covered more than a quarter of the distance to the camp his elation went by the board.

Spread fanwise, and apparently cutting off his retreat, were a dozen or more determined-looking men whose obvious intention was to secure him and the metal case.

If ever a Sea Scout was in a tight corner it was Patrol Leader Dick Hargreaves!

CHAPTER XIV

The Flower of Sleep

At the same time as Dick was entering the bandits' cave his sister, Joyce Hargreaves, was approaching Camlytch Bay in her " Kestrel " biplane at an altitude of three thousand feet.

Averaging one hundred and fifty miles an hour, it had taken her ninety minutes to make the flight from her home on her unheralded visit to the Sea Scouts camping near Haunted Harbour.

Although she had promised to pay them a visit she had made no definite arrangement; in fact, the morning's flight was commenced almost on the spur of the moment.

Joyce was a good cross-country pilot and although this was her first flight to Anglesey she had no difficulty in recognizing such landmarks as the Menai Bridge and the Britannia Tubular Railway-bridge, that connect the island to the Welsh mainland. From there she could discern the various bays on the northern shores of " Mona's Isle ". Her landmark for Haunted Harbour, she knew, was a ruined mill, shorn of its arms, standing close to a number of stone buildings, most of them also in ruins, on either side of a harbour.

According to her air maps there was a second-class landing ground adjoining the site of the camp. It was practically an emergency landing ground, aviators being warned not to make use of it except in exceptional circumstances. The fact that her brother was in camp near by with the rest of the troop was, as far as Joyce Hargreaves was concerned, an exceptional circumstance. Almost devoid of fear, she regarded a difficult landing-ground as a place to be welcomed rather than avoided. It gave her an opportunity to display her undoubted skill as an air pilot.

She was within three miles of her destination when, looking over the side of the cockpit, she noticed a vessel making towards Camlytch Bay—a large steam yacht, although from that altitude it seemed like a minute model.

Even as she looked, the yacht swung round and stood seaward. Michael Apulgrab had spotted the biplane high overhead, and, taking her to be one of the recently formed Royal Air Constabulary machines, had ordered his skipper to steer for the open sea beyond the three-mile limit. Gun-running was decidedly an unhealthy business when the " Air Cops " were about!

Joyce wondered why the yacht had suddenly altered course when obviously making for Haunted Harbour. Had she been a sailing craft the manœuvre might have been explained by the fact that she was tacking before getting a favourable slant of wind into port. But the yacht was a steam vessel.

She dismissed the matter from her mind. She now had other things to think about. There was the ruined mill; those white dots were the Sea Scouts' tents; that haze, the smoke rising from the camp-fires. The landing-ground, looking no larger than a pocket handkerchief and as smooth as a billiard table, lay just beyond.

Sure of her position, Joyce came down to two hundred feet—a safe margin to clear the cliffs on either side of the harbour.

Her biplane was recognized by the Sea Scouts. They were waving their caps and cheering the approaching air-woman although their cheers were drowned by the roar of the air-screw and the rush of the wind past the struts and bracing wires.

The landing-ground was decidedly bumpy, but by superb handling Joyce made a faultless landing, taxi-ing until the biplane came to a standstill within thirty yards of the nearest tent.

Mr. Dangerfield and every Sea Scout in the vicinity hastened to greet the new arrival, for Joyce Hargreaves was deservedly popular with the members of the troop to which her brother belonged.

" Where's Dick, Mr. Dangerfield?" she asked, when the exuberant demonstrations of welcome had subsided.

" Dick?" The Scoutmaster thought for a moment. He had so many things to occupy his attention that he had to ponder before he could reply. " Dick? He's gone for a walk along the cliffs. He'll be back in time for dinner, Miss Hargreaves. There's no fear of his missing *that*. I hope you're stopping and sampling our cooks' efforts. The cooks are drawn from your brother's patrol, so if you should happen to find fault with the fare you must forgive them, since Dick trained them for their cooks' badges."

"I think, if you don't mind, I'll see if I can find him," said Joyce. "My bus will be all right here, I suppose? Thanks awfully. Which way did he go?"

Mr. Dangerfield didn't know, but Second Jimmy Cotton pointed out the direction his chum had taken.

Having discarded her leather flying-coat and helmet, Joyce set out to find her brother. Jimmy Cotton's direction had been correct up to a certain point, but when the cliff path divided she was undecided which branch to take.

She took the left-hand path, which was the one Dick hadn't followed. Actually it was a short cut inland to the next bay. Here it ended at a sandy cove. There was no one in sight.

In vain the girl gave a good imitation of the Otters' patrol call. There was no reply, save for the screeching of the gulls as they glided past the face of the surf-bound cliffs bounding the cove.

"Rotten luck!" soliloquized the girl. "I must have missed him. Ten to one he's back in the camp already."

She began to retrace her steps, stopping now and then to gather wild flowers that grew profusely in the dells between the rocks.

Joyce had an exceptionally good knowledge of botany, but here was one plant that was quite unfamiliar to her. It had a pale blue leaf with serrated edges, each terminating in a minute spike.. The berries were small and of a peculiar hue—greenish, mottled with purple spots. There was a faint odour somewhat reminiscent of almond, yet not quite. There were only three or four of these plants growing within a small radius. She had not seen any similar in the course of her ramble.

The girl was still examining her interesting find when she heard footsteps behind her. Turning, she saw an old woman dressed in the typical Welsh style common fifty years ago but now rarely seen except on picture postcards. Her wrinkled face was surmounted by a low, black steeple-crowned hat with spotless white frills. She wore a black dress with a white apron and heavy, spreading skirts. On her arm she carried a basket half-filled with twigs for firewood.

The old woman curtseyed and wished Joyce " Good morning," adding, " the lady must beware of those flowers."

" Why?" asked Joyce quite naturally. " What are they? You see, I am a stranger here and this unknown flower interests me."

" It is not unknown to us, lady. We in these parts call it——" she gave the name in Welsh. To Joyce it sounded rather a nice name.

" Do you mind if I write it down?" she asked.

It was no easy matter. The old Welshwoman's pronunciation of English was difficult to follow, so at last Joyce had to hand her the paper and pencil.

Laboriously the peasant wrote:

CWS-G FLODYN.

" That means in your tongue ' The Flower of

Sleep ’,” explained the ancient dame. “ Those berries, look you: one steeped in a bucket of water makes the drink that gives deep sleep. Only one glassful will be enough. Two berries, at most three, and there is no awaking from sleep! It is a scarce plant, even here in Anglesey. I do not know if it grows in other parts of Wales—more than likely not. Now, do not take the plant away with you, lady. It is not good, look you—not good, not good!”

At first Joyce was under the impression that the beldame was trying to frighten her with the idea of being rewarded for her timely caution; but the old woman’s tone sounded sincere. And the girl had a mischievous trait that came to the surface at odd moments. This was one of them. Because the crone had warned her not to touch them she plucked the plants. There was also another reason. She wanted to take them home to add to her collection of specimens. If the professor of botany at her college could not identify them she would be able to score heavily, especially if the plants *did* possess the qualities which the old Welshwoman claimed for them!

After asking a few more questions, Joyce offered the woman some money. This she declined.

“ If it is tobacco you have, lady, I’ll be obliged,” she added.

Joyce could not help smiling at the thought that she might be carrying supplies of tobacco to give to the peasant women around Haunted Harbour.

“ I’ve some cigarettes,” she replied, and gave her a couple.

Setting her basket on the ground, the ancient dame produced a blackened clay pipe. With the skill of a fish-wife gutting a herring she split the cigarette and rammed the weed into the bowl, and then asked for a match.

" Good day to you, lady!" she exclaimed, as she picked up her basket. " You're venturesome, lady; that I can see. But 'ware the berries of the *Cws-g Flodyn.*"

CHAPTER XV

Delayed Action

Arriving back at the camp, Joyce Hargreaves found that dinner was on the point of being served—a weird menu in which lentil soup and shepherd's pie formed two of the main items.

Going across to her aeroplane, the girl deposited the plants in the pocket of her leather flying-coat, patted her hair and powdered her face and then returned to her place of honour at the Sea Scouts' mid-day repast.

" Dick hasn't returned yet, Miss Hargreaves," declared Mr. Dangerfield. " He'll make up for lost time when he does. Nothing like fresh air and sea breezes to give one an appetite."

" And I'm quite hungry," frankly admitted the girl, who, except under present circumstances, would have drawn the line at this glutinous mess ladled on to a tin plate from a blackened iron dixie. But it smelt appetizing!

Then the S.M. remembered that the patrol leader of the Otters was not the only absentee. It was past noon and Courtney Mills had not returned. There was that telegram to be dispatched to New

Scotland Yard. Ah well! That could wait until after dinner. Another twenty minutes wouldn't make very much difference, one way or the other. In the interval, the Secret Service man might turn up.

Meanwhile there was dirty work going on, not at the proverbial cross-roads, but on the unattended biplane. At intervals during the morning The Ferret had spent a considerable time in the Old Mill. His captive's condition was giving him concern, since Courtney Mills showed no signs of returning consciousness. Redpole mentally consigned the lorry-driver to perdition for putting unnecessary force into the blow.

In his spare time The Ferret kept the bay under observation through the open window of the second story of the mill. The deep recess made by the massiveness of the masonry effectually prevented any chance observer catching sight of him as he levelled his binoculars in the direction from which the *Katharina* was expected.

At last he noticed a cloud of smoke just above the horizon. The yacht was approaching so rapidly that half an hour later she was near enough for the watcher to reassure himself. In fact, she was two hours before the arranged time, and would have to wait for the tide before the cargo could be taken off to her from the cave.

Suddenly Redpole caught the distinctive sound of an aeroplane. It was making towards Haunted Harbour, and was, as far as he could judge, almost above the *Katharina*—her pilot probably was taking more than ordinary interest in Michael Apulgrab's yacht!

Then, when a few minutes later the biplane landed close to the Sea Scouts' camp, The Ferret cursed audibly. In his mind the machine could not be other than one sent by New Scotland Yard to nose into the disappearance of the case containing the KI.

Redpole had no quarrel with the police. He regarded them as rivals in a great game. When, as had happened more than once, he " took his medicine ", he did so philosophically, realizing that he had been outwitted. He had refrained from " finishing off " the two Admiralty officials, although he had no scruple about wrecking the car and rendering the occupants insensible. He had taken Courtney Mills more or less under his protection even though he knew that the Secret Service man was hot on the track of the gang. He was actually concerned lest he should not recover from the blow that had rendered him unconscious, not merely because he drew the line at murder, but because he had a sneaking regard for this detective.

But the sight of the aeroplane roused The Ferret to fury. That, in his opinion, wasn't playing the game! Pity the blighters hadn't crashed badly when they came down on the uneven ground! And there were those meddlesome Sea Scouts—young narks in the making—rushing to greet the Air Police.

The throng round the machine impeded his view, but he could see that the biplane had been flown solo. He could see the leather-garbed pilot alight; but he didn't guess that it was a girl who had alighted at Haunted Harbour.

Swarming down the rope to the semi-underground basement of the mill, Redpole opened the trap-door and descended into the tunnel. Almost immediately he encountered his henchman Taff, who had been sent by the bandits in the cave to give him some message.

" Nip along to the cave, Taff, and tell the boys there's an Air Cop's 'bus just arrived to mush things up. And while you're about it, bring along that haversack of mine."

Taff departed on his errands, while The Ferret returned to his post of observation. He noticed that the crowd around the stationary biplane had dispersed. The silly juggins of a pilot hadn't even left a Sea Scout to guard it!

Presently the Welshman returned and handed Redpole the haversack. On subjects of very little interest Taff would talk for hours. Those of vital importance he kept to himself unless asked. So he reported that he had told Redbeard and his companions of the arrival of the New Scotland Yard aeroplane, but omitted to mention the sounding of the alarm bell that had made them rush to the mouth of the cave in pursuit of a daring intruder.

The Ferret waited a few minutes, then, getting neither sign nor sound from the bandits, he ascended the ladder to the Old Mill. Here he replaced the trap-hatch and swarmed up the rope to the first story.

" They've got the breeze up properly," he muttered, referring to the men in the cave. " Perhaps it's as well. 'If you want a job done well, do it yourself' isn't a bad motto."

It had been his intention to send out one of the gang to cripple the biplane—not that he was afraid to run the risk himself. The Ferret never ordered anyone to undertake any hazardous job that he himself was not prepared to carry out.

Unstrapping the haversack, Redpole carefully placed the contents upon the floor. It was what he termed his "emergency ration", and had been packed to accompany him when the time arrived for him to sever his connexion with Haunted Harbour and embark in the *Katharina*. There were tools of all kinds that could be effectively employed in forcing safe doors; gelignite for heavier tasks of a similar nature; small stone jars containing undiluted sulphuric and muriatic acids—making counterfeit coins was one of The Ferret's numerous accomplishments, although latterly he had dabbled in less risky arts—and a small though choice selection of hypodermic syringes.

Holding up a small hacksaw and a pair of pliers, Redpole surveyed them in a thoughtful mood. Effective but crude, he decided. It wasn't much use crippling the aeroplane so that it would be unable to take off. Two or more machines would quickly be forthcoming to take its place, and then, one might be sure, steps would be taken to see that they were not tampered with.

The great idea was a "delayed action" disablement of the 'plane while in flight. The pilot's life would almost certainly be sacrificed, but the blame for that, Redpole argued, must be put down to the authorities who had so unfairly pitted science against straightforward crime!

Yes, partly severing some of the struts and wires by hacksaw and pliers was far too crude. Quite possibly the pilot might notice the damage before the machine took off. Something that would impair the rigidity of the bus without external evidence, would have to be used.

He picked up the small stone flask containing sulphuric acid, shook it to reassure himself that the corrosive liquid had not evaporated, and then slipped it into his pocket.

Taking another cautious survey of the unattended machine and its vicinity, The Ferret slid down the rope, crept out of the lowest storey window—which was masked from observation by the walls of the ruined outbuildings—and then made his way towards his objective.

In the near distance he could hear the Sea Scouts engaged in kicking a football about although it was the month of August and the shade temperature was in the neighbourhood of ninety degrees! Elsewhere everything appeared quiet, with not a soul in sight.

Arriving at the aeroplane, The Ferret set to work quickly and methodically. Round the base of each of the two starboard struts he poured a few drops of the powerful acid. A thin cloud of vapour arose as the sulphuric began to bite into the aluminium alloy, but in a few seconds this died down, although the corrosive action would still continue, but with less rapidity.

Two bracing wires he treated similarly, allowing the acid to work its way between the turnbuckles and their threaded rods. Provided he had timed the job accurately, the biplane would be able to take off properly, but would collapse under the upward stress when high in the air.

Carefully recorking the bottle, The Ferret gave another appraising glance at his handiwork and, finding that the coast was clear, retraced his steps to his observation post in the Old Mill.

CHAPTER XVI

Chased!

Dick Hargreaves was in a very tight corner. At first sight it looked as if he was completely trapped. He would have been, there and then, if he had lost his head.

One chance remained: to bear hard to his left and break past the right-hand wing of the crescent line of his would-be captors.

It was touch and go. There was hardly the space of two yards between him and the edge of the cliff. One man only barred his path at this particular point. The others were rapidly closing upon him.

"Stop, you young varmin!" shouted the fellow in his way, holding out his arms as if he were trying to head off a flock of sheep.

Had the bandit had any knowledge of tackling low the result might have been very different. Either he hadn't or he failed to put that knowledge into practice.

Before he could bring himself to repulse the onslaught, the patrol leader's fist caught him squarely between the eyes. Down he went, temporarily blinded, his hands and legs waving in the air like the limbs of a capsized crab.

Dick, temporarily stopping as he dealt the blow, had to leap to clear the fellow he had felled.

He had won through the cordon, but very quickly he realized that he was by no means out of the wood; far from it.

His pursuers were between him and the camp. Every yard he covered in his flight was taking him one yard farther from his chums. Although a good runner, he was already feeling the effect of his exertions, while his tumble on the slippery rocks had jolted a knee-cap.

For some minutes he held his distance; but he gave the bandits full marks for the agility with which they cleared the rough ground in their chase of him.

The path, his only line of retreat, was taking him towards Haunted Harbour. There, amongst the labyrinth of derelict buildings, he might find a hiding-place. If he could cross the head of the tidal harbour he could run for safety in the village of Camlytch. There was a police station there, and even with a superiority in numbers on the part of the bandits, they would not risk an encounter with the local police.

But could Dick stay the course?

He was breathing painfully. More than once he stumbled, but recovered himself. His pursuers were now gaining. The nearest was perhaps a hundred yards behind him.

Ahead was a kind of natural rocky terrace rising in three wide steps from the pier-head of Haunted Harbour. He was approaching the middle terrace, which terminated abruptly within ten feet of the derelict quayside in a drop of about ten feet.

Dick was well acquainted with the locality. He knew that there was an iron ladder on the wall of the ten feet descent, and that beyond it a semi-artificial, semi-natural path led towards the head of the tidal harbour.

Down the ladder he hurried, almost landing upon the head of a man who was sitting with his back to the wall. For an instant the patrol leader thought he had fallen into a trap, and that one of the gang had been lurking there to cut off his retreat.

He was speedily and agreeably undeceived when the man called out in astonishment.

" A mussy me, boy! What's scaring you?"

Dick recognized the man as Old Pongo. If he had another name, none of the troop had ever heard it. He was a hard-working fisherman who had fallen upon hard times. Too old to be of use in the boats, he earned a very meagre livelihood by mending nets for the other toilers of the sea. The little he made, together with his Old Age Pension, was just sufficient to enable him to avoid that dread of declining years—the Poor House—or Poor Law Institution. When the Sea Scouts were in camp they made a point of helping Old Pongo with gifts of food, and frequently Dick had bought him a few ounces of tobacco, never dreaming that he was " casting bread upon the waters ".

The patrol leader had to make up his mind rapidly. Either he must continue his flight against long odds or else throw himself upon the mercy of the old fisherman. If Old Pongo did give him away, either by accident or through the menaces of the gang, he would be in a hopeless state. They would recover the precious KI and probably throw him into the harbour.

Had the tide been in Dick would not have hesitated to jump in and swim across to the steps on the other side of the harbour; but since the bed of the haven was high and dry and a good thirty feet below the path, he realized that a leap would result in broken limbs on the hard, irregular stones.

" They're after me!" panted Dick. " Hide me!"

Fortunately Old Pongo, who was engaged in mending some nets, was remarkably " quick in the uptake " for a physical wreck of nigh upon eighty.

" Under here!" he replied tersely, and lifted the edge of a folded net.

Dick scrambled under and lay still, except for the loud pounding of his heart. The nets reeked abominably of dried seaweed, fish-scales and the decayed remains of crabs, tempered by the reek of tar.

He had not long to wait.

The iron-shod soles of the foremost of his pursuers grated on the iron rungs of the ladder, the foot of which was within a yard of the spot where he lay concealed. Before the clatter of the fellow's boots had told Dick that he was on the lowermost tread, others of the gang were already making their way down, puffing and blowing with their exertions.

" Where be 'im tu?" demanded one of Old Pongo.

The fisherman was certainly game and astute. Had he asked " Who?" the bandits would have been suspicious. Instead he slowly removed his pipe from his mouth and pointed with the stem in the direction of the Old Mill!

"Come on, mate!" shouted one of the bandits. "We'll get him! The Ferret'll head him off, right enough!"

They disappeared behind a projection in the winding path. Dick remained where he was, painfully drawing in deep breaths of air tinged with the mingled odours of the net, and trying to think what he should do in order to get back to the camp without being spotted by the gang, who would be scouring the ruins in all directions.

"They've gone, boy!" announced Old Pongo. "Get you gone, look you!"

Dick emerged from his place of concealment, and hurriedly thanked his benefactor.

Apparently his only chance, now that the bandits were between him and the head of the harbour, was to retrace his course past the cliff overhanging the cave—since he had cut away the rope-ladder there was no chance of the bandits there scaling the beetling crag—and thence back to the camp.

Ascending the iron ladder, Dick proceeded to carry out his project. He hobbled rather than ran, for he was still short of breath and his knee was now painfully stiff.

But he had not taken into account two things.

One was that the fellow he had floored had not continued his part in the pursuit. The other was that, for a considerable distance the cliff path was in full view of the watchers in the Old Mill.

Before the Sea Scout had gone more than a hundred yards The Ferret, who had just learnt from the searchers why they were in pursuit, caught a glimpse of the patrol leader's white cap.

For once he threw caution to the wind—for was not the all-important secret of the KI at stake?—and shouted to the men searching the buildings close to the Mill that the Sea Scout was doubling back on his tracks.

Like hounds in full cry the bandits took up the fresh trail and by cutting across country—the cliff-path wound considerably and made a general curve northwards—they stood an excellent chance of intercepting the fugitive.

To his consternation Dick realized that once more he was on the point of being hemmed in. Unable to run with any speed, he crept a few yards and then hid himself between two large boulders. There he lay, breathing deeply to regain his lost " wind " should it be imperative for him to take to his heels again.

He hoped not. He had done enough running this morning to last him for the rest of the camp. He would remain where he was, provided his hiding-place was not discovered; if necessary, until darkness set in, before risking returning to camp. More than likely, however, Mr. Dangerfield would lead a search party long before then, and with thirty or more hefty young Sea Scouts on the alert the gang would not dare to issue from their retreat.

And when his chums found him, with the much-debated prize in his possession, it would be an easy matter, since he knew the two " bolt-holes " of the gang's secret cave, to summon the local police to guard the entrances until hunger compelled the rogues to surrender.

Incidentally Dick knew nothing of the secret passageway between the Faucet Inn and the Old Mill, but that did not prevent him making plans as he lay in his place of concealment.

He was hoping that his pursuers would once more overrun his hiding-place, but to his dismay he heard a man, not more than ten yards away, shout:

" He's somewhere about here, lads! I saw him as I was coming along to join you!"

With feelings of consternation Dick recognized the voice as that of the man whom he had knocked down. Then he guessed the true facts. The fellow, probably nursing his hurts, had remained behind and had thus seen the fugitive as he crept towards his present place of concealment.

From the " lie of the land " the patrol leader knew that his retreat was entirely cut off unless he plunged into the sea. The distance round the cliffs was too far and the tidal current too strong for him to attempt to reach the camp by swimming.

But he could swim across the narrow channel to the East Rat. At one point there was a shelving descent to the water's edge. The state of the tide had reduced the deep-water distance to nearly one half of what it was at high water; and although the current ran strongly between the little island and the mainland—in the circumstances he regarded Angelsey as " the mainland "—he stood a fifty-fifty chance of reaching the comparative safety of the East Rat.

If he failed—but somehow Dick knew that he wouldn't! Some of the gang might venture after him, but once on the island he could hurl stones most effectively at his pursuers while they were still swimming.

Springing to his feet, the patrol leader resumed his dash for life and freedom. He had recovered his " second wind ", and in the excitement of the present events he was heedless of the damage to his knees.

He had a clear gain of about the length of a cricket pitch before the nearest of the gang caught sight of him.

They, too, were feeling the effects of the chase without the benefit of even a brief rest; but seeing that their quarry was heading towards what they considered to be a dead-end they were content for the present to follow in a more or less leisurely fashion.

They had him right enough, they thought, for Dick was making his way down a small ravine, the natural walls on either side increasing in height and steepness as they approached the seaward line of cliffs. He would be trapped in a sort of bottle-neck, with the sea in front of him, the unclimbable cliffs on either hand and half a dozen hefty pursuers at his heels.

The patrol leader also eased his pace as he approached the edge of the shore. The bandits, noticing this, thought that he would not dare to jump into the sea and that his hesitation was but a forerunner to his surrender.

Making his way down the serrated slope, Dick stopped at the water's edge. To dive in would entail the risk of striking his head against a submerged rock, for there were ledges over which the surf was running.

He waded in. How horribly cold the water felt!

The sea wasn't really cold. It was merely a question of comparison between the summer sea temperature and that of the air. That was one disadvantage of walking in on a hot day instead of his usual procedure of taking a clear header.

As soon as he was waist deep, Dick struck out. The preliminary chill of the water soon ceased to worry him. After a dozen good strokes he trod water and looked shorewards. His pursuers were bunching together and talking excitedly. To his intense satisfaction, no one attempted to carry the chase into the sea.

" He's making for the island!" he heard one of them declare. " Three of you had better stop here in case he turns back; the rest of us'll get the motor-boat and then we'll nab him sure enough."

" She ain't afloat yet," objected another.

" She will be—nearly. If it comes to that, we can shove her off!"

That was bad news for the patrol leader. Unless he could attract his chums' attention by signalling from the island, sooner or later the bandits on their motor-boat would land and effect his capture.

He struck out again in an endeavour to reach the little island in the shortest possible time. Then, if he were in imminent danger of capture, he would hide the precious case and trust to luck to retrieve it if he were subsequently able to regain the camp. He quite realized the possibility that the ruffians, baulked of the chief object of their quest, might murder their victim through sheer blind ferocity.

It was a terrifically hard swim. Although the channel between the East Rat and the mainland looked but a short distance when viewed from the top of the cliffs, it was actually considerable. In addition, Dick had to contend with the current that surged along the deep-water strait. Even as he swam the island *appeared* to be moving. He realized that this illusion was caused by the fact that the tidal stream was running broadside on to the direction in which he was running.

For some minutes it was touch and go whether he would be swept away from his goal or not. Then, making a supreme effort, he gained the relatively slack water under the western extremity of the island.

About thirty more strokes and his feet touched the submerged ledge. Staggering through the steadily-shoaling water, he reached dry ground.

He looked back again. Only three of the gang remained in the gully through which he had made his way to the water. The others were already on their way back to the cave to launch the boat.

It would take them some time to get there. The direct way over the cliff was debarred them because he had cut away the rope ladder. They would have to go to the Old Mill and reach the cave by one of their bolt-holes.

With the water dripping from his saturated jersey and shorts, Dick commenced to make his way to the highest part of the East Rat. More than once he patted his hip-pocket to reassure himself that the metal case was still there. Not until he failed to establish signalling connexions with the camp would he secrete the object for which he had risked so much.

He reached the summit after a stiffish climb. Then, removing his cap, he waved it to and fro in the hope of attracting attention.

For several precious minutes his efforts were fruitless. Although he could see the tents, the smoke from the camp-fires and a regular line of dark figures that he knew to be the Sea Scouts sitting down to their midday meal—didn't he wish he was with them! —the lads were obviously so keen on their food that they had no thought for anything else.

" I'll have to hide the case after all!" decided Dick. " The blighters will be here before very long now!"

CHAPTER XVII

Aid from the Air

"Push that bread over this way, Ginger!" said Blacklock, during the course of the meal.

Generally such a request would be promptly complied with, but Sea Scout Ginger Smith failed to pay any attention to it. His eyes were fixed seawards and in the direction of that expanse of rock known as the East Rat.

"What's the matter with you, Ginger?" inquired Blacklock. "It's the bread I want."

"I say!" exclaimed the disobliging Sea Scout, addressing no one in particular, but the troop in general. "What's that over there? Something white waving about. Looks like someone marooned on the island."

"It's a gull, I expect," suggested Matterson.

"Never saw a gull waggle like that," persisted Ginger. "I say Jimmy, what do you make of that?"

"Make of what?" asked the Second.

"Ginger can't tell the difference between a man and a dicky-bird," scoffed Matterson. "He's got an idea into his head that someone's waving something on the island."

"I believe Ginger's right," declared Cotton. "I'll see what Mr. Dangerfield has to say about it."

He got up from the table and went up to the S.M., who was helping his guest to a plateful of stew.

"We'll soon see," he decided when the Second had stated what Ginger Smith thought he saw. "Run along to my tent and fetch my glasses, will you?"

Through the powerful binoculars the issue was no longer in doubt.

"It's Dick!" announced the S.M. "The silly ass—excuse my speaking of your brother in those terms, Miss Hargreaves!—must have taken one of the boats and got stranded. . . . Fetch the hand-flags, Cotton, and signal the acknowledgment. Now, then, you with signallers' badges! Get your telescopes or glasses and see if you can read the message."

Holding the hand-flags aloft and standing well apart from the others, Billy made the recognized acknowledgment.

Hargreaves commenced to send his message. He was holding his cap in one hand and his scarf in the other in order to make the semaphored letters more distinct.

Jimmy Cotton read the message aloud:

"Chased by gang. Send help! Have KI here!"

That was as much as Mr. Dangerfield wanted to know, although Dick meant to add that Courtney Mills was a prisoner in the smugglers' cave. Actually the Secret Service man was lying gagged and bound in the old Mill, but the patrol leader had got a bit mixed on the point.

"Give the O.K.!" ordered the S.M. briskly. "Now lads! The Hawks and Kestrels will man all available boats and make for the East Rat as fast as you jolly well know how. The remaining patrols will stand by."

The meal was hurriedly interrupted. No one gave another thought to the cravings of the inner man. The two patrols told off to the boats under the orders of their respective patrol leaders, tore off down to the cave where the two pulling cutters were drawn up.

Since the island was dead to wind'ard it would be a waste of time to employ sail. Stout oars and strong sinews were the quickest way in which to get the two boats to the East Rat.

Even then it would take a considerable time. Not only had the boats' crew to pull dead in the teeth of the wind, but they were opposed by a fairly hot tide.

Nevertheless the Hawks and the Kestrels broke all previous records in the time they took to launch and man the boats which, under long, easy strokes, were quickly heading towards the East Rat—to the envy and admiration of the other patrols, especially the Otters, who did not see why the S.M. should debar them from going to the rescue of their popular patrol leader.

But Mr. Dangerfield had a good reason for that—the Otters were temporarily without their patrol leader and consequently were one man short. The Otters might be more profitably employed in other directions.

Meanwhile Joyce Hargreaves was not idle. Not knowing anything about the activities of the gun-running gang except from the bald facts mentioned in her brother's semaphore message, she realized that Dick was in danger and in need of immediate assistance.

" Mr. Dangerfield, I'm taking off at once," she announced. " I can get to that island long before the boats can."

" But it's a rough, rocky place," objected the S.M.

" I'll have to risk that," persisted the girl. " I'll have a good look at it before I come down. Against this wind I can bring the bus down in a space no larger than a tennis court."

The Scoutmaster knew it was useless to try to dissuade her. He couldn't stop her from flying to her brother's aid. And perhaps there might be a fairly level stretch of ground on the island.

" Make sure you can land first," he rejoined. " Do you want any help to take off?"

" Yes, please."

While Joyce was hurrying to the aeroplane, the S.M. gave the Otters' patrol signal.

" Place your self under Miss Hargreaves' orders," said the S.M. " She's taking off at once."

Some of the Otters, Jimmy Cotton included, hoped that they would be asked to go up too; but they were disappointed.

Hastily donning her flying coat and helmet, Joyce directed the Sea Scouts to run the biplane round in the opposite direction to the one in which she had alighted and to hold on to the lower wings until she shouted to them to let go.

"And let go all together, mind," she added warningly.

There was no need to swing the propeller. The motor, which was of recent manufacture, was fitted with a self-starter—an immense boon in the event of the pilot's having to take off without assistance. Joyce had "had some" with a previous machine not thus fitted. It meant swinging the propeller and then making a hurried leap into the cock-pit to readjust the controls. On one occasion, the engine having been given too much throttle, the bus moved forward directly after she had swung her propeller. Narrowly escaping being hit by the rapidly whirling blade, she had had to chase the bus as it taxied over the ground. She won the race, but only when the machine came to a standstill, with shattered prop and crumpled wings, in a thick hedge!

The motor fired at the first touch of the starter. Taxi-ing to the other end of the taking-off ground, Joyce swung the bus head to wind and gave the engine increased throttle.

All the while The Ferret had been watching from the Old Mill in a state of ill-suppressed fury. Taff had arrived with the startling message that one of the Sea Scouts had raided the cave and had got away with the case containing the KI, and that Redbeard and his men had gone in pursuit, but the fugitive had swum off to the East Rat. He added that Redbeard was setting out in the motor-boat to the island to capture the Sea Scout, who almost certainly still had the precious metal case in his possession.

And now, confound him! that Air Cop was hurrying back to his 'plane. If he were making for the island the biplane might get there before the corrosive acid had full time to complete its task. Redpole hoped to goodness the fellow would break his neck in any case, whether the acid worked in time or not.

Then he gaped in sheer astonishment.

It wasn't a member of the Royal Air Constabulary! The pilot was a girl! Perhaps she had come down near Haunted Harbour either because she could not help it or else she had come to pay a harmless visit to the Sea Scouts' camp.

And now he was sending her to her death!

For a brief moment Redpole was on the point of throwing caution to the winds and shouting a warning to the girl.

He restrained himself with a strong effort, stifling his good intention by the thought that, should the biplane collapse in mid-air, the girl could save herself by means of her parachute. Only he wasn't at all sure that she was wearing one.

But the deciding factor was the importance of receiving KI. Though still reluctant to let the girl take off on her extremely hazardous flight, The Ferret remained silent and motionless in his place of concealment.

It was a fairly short take-off against the wind, but an easy task for such an experienced airwoman as Joyce Hargreaves.

The biplane, skimming the tops of the tents by a margin of ten feet, soared skywards.

At five hundred feet, Joyce " flattened out ". There was no need for more altitude. Fifteen seconds brought her immediately over the East Rat, and how insignificant the island looked even from that height above the sea!

There was her brother Dick waving to her. He was warning her off!

" Thinks I can't land, does he?" said the girl to herself. " I'll show him I jolly well can!"

She had marked her proposed landing, a stretch of bare ground that looked fairly level, sufficient, and only just sufficient, to descend upon, and then only thanks to the strong wind. Since the place was on the highest part of the island the breeze would be true. There were not likely to be any air-eddies, as might have been the case if the ground rose still higher to wind'ard.

Throttling down to a bare fifty miles an hour against a breeze of about half that velocity, Joyce put the nose of her machine down.

A few seconds later there was a bump and a loud bang. The biplane rocked and rolled.

" Careless of me!" thought the girl. " That's a tyre gone! I'm here anyway. That's something."

She brought the bus to a standstill, propeller still revolving slowly and the lower wing-tips alternately brushing the ground.

Dick came limping towards her.

There was no time for explanations.

With a "Well done, Joyce!" the patrol leader scrambled into the after-cockpit.

"Short take-off!" he shouted. "Think she'll do it?"

"Must!" was the girl's laconic reply.

She revved up. With a flat tyre the machine taxied with a decided tendency to swerve to the left. More revs and yet more revs!

They were only a dozen yards from the wind'ard end of the island before the biplane parted company with the East Rat. They were up, and Dick could hardly refrain shouting at the top of his voice for sheer joy.

He could see the bandits' motor-boat leaving the cave. They would have whacked the Sea Scouts in their two pulling boats in the race to the island, but good old Joyce had beaten them both!

"Where now?" inquired the girl through the voice-tube.

It wanted but Dick to tell her to make for Croydon, whence he could have taken the KI to New Scotland Yard and Joyce would have set a course for that Aerodrome without hesitation. Dick would have said so, even though it meant risking double-pneumonia sitting in wet clothes in the after cockpit, but for the fact that he didn't want to let Courtney Mills down.

His plan was to return to the camp, inform Mr. Dangerfield of the Secret Service man's plight and let the S.M. take the necessary steps to secure Courtney's release. After that he would hand the Yard Man the metal case and "let him get on with it".

Then and only then could the troop resume its normal camp life. And, naturally, he was anxious to be in at the final round up of the gang who had been so close on his heels.

" Back to the camp," he replied.

Haunted Harbour bore dead to lee'ard, consequently the machine had to make a semi-circular turn before making for its objective.

It was during this turn that the catastrophe which The Ferret had planned and then had hoped wouldn't occur, took place.

Two struts collapsed almost simultaneously. The lower wing buckled upwards until its tip touched that of the upper one.

The machine gave a violent lurch to starboard and, twisting and turning like a bird with a damaged wing, began to plunge headlong into the sea.

CHAPTER XVIII

Captured!

Strangely enough, Dick Hargreaves was conscious of no sensation of fear during that terrific downward swoop. He quite realized what was happening and apart from apprehension as to his sister's fate, he experienced a remarkably detached outlook—a sort of indifference to personal danger.

Automatically his fingers went to the quick-release clip of his safety belt, although he knew he wouldn't stand the ghost of a chance when the wreckage crashed nose-on into the sea.

Although she did not know the nature of the disaster, Joyce kept her head. The moment the biplane was out of control she switched off the ignition and juggled both with joy-stick and runner bar in a vain effort to regain an even keel.

Up leapt the sea to meet them—at least that's what it appeared to the patrol leader to do. Being a mere passenger, he could do nothing but hang on tightly and await the impending crash.

It seemed minutes to him before the impact. Actually it was only a few seconds; but almost at the last moment the nose of the 'plane lifted. The terrific downward momentum was checked.

With a resounding splash, and amidst a double cloud of spray, the doomed biplane struck the surface with a force that jarred Dick's spine.

They were down and still alive. More than that, they were apparently unhurt.

The respite was only temporary. Already the wreckage was on the point of foundering. Columns of steam, as the water came in contact with the hot engine, told them that the motor was submerged. The danger lay in the crew becoming entangled in the twisted mass of wing fabric, struts and wires.

They unbuckled their safety belts. By this time the water was level with the instrument board in the for'ard cockpit and half-way up the coaming of the rear one.

" Jump for it!" shouted Dick.

He waited only till he saw that his sister had avoided the wreckage and was swimming strongly, before he dived into the sea.

By comparison with his recent immersion, how warm the water was! To his chilled body it was like plunging into a hot bath.

A few strokes brought him close alongside Joyce.

" You're all right?" he asked breathlessly.

" Yes—quite."

In silence they watched the last of the wrecked biplane disappear.

" The boats will be here soon," declared Joyce after a while. " The Sea Scouts will have seen us crash."

" Bound to," agreed Dick, but he forebore to express his fears. Undoubtedly the fall of the crippled machine had been seen, not only by his chums but by his late pursuers. They had a motor-boat; the Sea Scouts had not—at least the one they did possess had not put out in company with the two pulling boats.

With their eyes only a couple of inches above the surface their range of vision was considerably limited. So far, they could see no sign of any approaching craft. Even the cliffs on either side of Haunted Harbour looked low and a long way off.

Actually, craft were approaching from three distinct directions. The Sea Scouts were rowing their hardest, but were still two miles from the scene of the crash and with little to guide them as to the spot where it occurred. Four miles away the steam-yacht *Katharina*, from whose bridge Michael Apulgrab had witnessed the result of his henchman's handiwork, was making for the scene; not necessarily to effect the rescue of the supposed Air Police but to seize the opportunity to close the land and pick up the final consignment of her smuggled cargo from the bandit's motor-boat.

Lastly, the motor-boat in charge of the determined Redbeard, was going all out with the idea of effecting the hitherto elusive Sea Scout's capture and of regaining possession of the Canadian millionaire's secret.

With feelings of dismay Dick caught sight of the motor-boat's bows as they threw out clouds of spray. She was now only a matter of a mile away and had an incontestable advantage over the Sea Scouts' boat, both as regards distance and speed.

He had no objection to being rescued, but he was greatly averse to being taken prisoner by these ruffians!

And Joyce would be captured too. There was some consolation: they would not be likely to ill-use a girl.

Then there was the metal case which was still in his hip-pocket! It must never fall into their hands. He would let it sink to the bottom of the sea first, even though that was taking a great responsibility on his shoulders. He realized now that in his attempt to succeed as a lone-hand Scout he had made a bad error in taking the case from the secret cave. He should have cleared out unobserved and then brought the police and the Sea Scouts to raid the subterranean retreat.

It was too late now.

Dick drew the case from his pocket.

It floated!

Heavy though the metal was, the hollow object displaced water of more than its own weight. Consequently it would float, and since it was hermetically sealed and the patrol leader was without means of opening it, it must continue to be buoyant.

It wasn't like a dispatch. He couldn't swallow the thing! He might hide it in his cap, which, somewhat remarkably, was still jammed on his head; but they would be bound to examine that in their search. And it was no use giving it to Joyce. They would search her too, more than likely. If she knew nothing about it beyond the bald message he had semaphored to the camp, she could truthfully disclaim all knowledge of what it was like and where it was.

Suddenly inspiration came. Why not slip the case between his calf and the folded top of his stocking?

Treading water, he did so.

He couldn't see the result but by the feel of it the flat metal case made an ominous bulge. He'd have to risk it and trust to luck to avoid detection.

A few moments later the motor-boat dashed up, reversed and lost way within an oar's length of the swimmers.

"Game's up!" exclaimed Redbeard, who was at the wheel, while his two companions heaved Dick over the side like a stranded crab. "You ain't half given us a run for our money, confound you. In with the other bloke, Ted!"

"It's a girl!" announced the man in surprise, as he lifted the leather-coated flying-girl over the gunwale—no easy task owing to the weight of her waterlogged flying kit.

"So 'tis," agreed Redbeard. "Wot's she doing with the Air Cops?"

"She's my sister," declared Dick. "And she has nothing to do with the Air Police. You weren't after her, so will you kindly land her as soon as possible?"

"Oh-o!" ejaculated Redbeard. "Catch me doing that! We'll have to see what the Boss has to say about it. . . . Lash that youngster's arms, Ted!"

The helmsman let in the clutch. The motor-boat gathered way, but instead of turning and making for the shore, as Dick expected she would do, the craft headed seaward.

Since it was of no use to offer resistance, the patrol leader allowed the fellow known as Ted to secure his arms behind his back. He was then told to lie down on the bottom boards on one side of the engine case. Joyce was ordered to sit down on the opposite side.

The space between the curved deck for'ard and the bulkhead separating it from the stern-sheets was uncomfortably crowded, since the captives took up a large proportion of the available room.

Redbeard was steering; Ted apparently was in charge of the motor, while the third man was perched upon a heap of barrels and canvas sacks that, covered by a tarpaulin, took up the whole of the after part of the boat abaft the transverse bulkhead.

Presently Redbeard motioned to Ted to take the wheel. In his hour of triumph. Following his long and persistent pursuit, he could not refrain from gloating. He was that sort of coarse, ill-mannered ruffian.

"You two'll be goin' for a long voyage in that yacht!" he began, pointing towards the *Katharina*, which was now rapidly drawing nearer. "I reckon it's a trip to East Africy an' a bit further if you give trouble. See here, my lad, wot have you done with that lump o' metal you pinched from the cave?"

"Hidden it," replied Dick.

"Where?"

"I swam to the East Rat, as you know," continued the Sea Scout. "There are hundreds of snug hiding-places there. That'll give you something to do, won't it?"

Rather to Dick's disappointment, the bandit received the news without a display of anger. In fact, he looked rather pleased!

Provided he could shift responsibility for the loss of the KI from his shoulders he was " on a good thing ". Michael Apulgrab, his employer, would leave no stone unturned to gain possession of the metal case and its contents. Although he would have to take the *Katharina* " foreign " with her cargo of arms and ammunition, Apulgrab would certainly alter his plans to the extent of making another visit to Camlytch Bay with the object of obtaining the secret KI.

Meanwhile, Redbeard and his men, knowing where they thought the case had been hidden, would make a thorough search of the East Rat and get well paid for the job. The only snag, so far, was that The Ferret had not been taken off to the yacht, as was originally intended. Not that Redbeard minded if Redpole was stranded, except that he didn't want to be under the latter's orders while the exploration of the island was being made. The Ferret would, he knew, claim more than a fair share of the reward Apulgrab would certainly offer for the finding of the hidden case.

Having obtained, as he thought, the required information so easily from the Sea Scout, Redbeard took up his stand beside Ted with his back to his prisoners. The third man, because the boat was pitching considerably, was sprawled at full length upon the tarpaulin over the cargo.

Redbeard's statement made Dick think furiously. Apparently Joyce and he were to be shanghaied and taken to some foreign port and there put ashore, to find their way back as best they might. There was a veiled hint of something else. Obviously the metal case was the cause of it all. So far, he had put the ruffian off the scent; there remained the big risk of the bandits discovering its hiding-place.

Reasoning things out, the patrol leader came to the conclusion that, having transhipped Joyce and himself to the yacht, the motor-boat's crew, or some of them, would take her back to the secret cave or to some other remote spot on the Anglesey coast. She was too heavy and cumbersome to be hoisted on board the yacht. It would require a very strong derrick and tackle for that. As to means of identification, although she bore no name, the motor-boat had the letters CH and the number 123 cut in the deck beam supporting the short fore-deck. These had been painted over, but they were still faintly yet unmistakably discernible. They indicated that previously the boat had been registered as a fishing craft at the port of Camlytch.

Dick particularly noticed that the bottom boards were firmly nailed down. The planks were ill-fitting, with irregular gaps between the boards. The bilges stank abominably, so it was reasonable to conclude that the floor boards had not been taken up for a very long time and perhaps it would be weeks and months before they were taken up again.

Here was a hiding-place for the secret KI. Later on, if he regained his liberty or could contrive to communicate with his friends, he could give a description of the boat and then either the police or the Customs officer could trace her and gain possession of the case.

He must act quickly, for the yacht and the motor-boat were fast converging. Redbeard and Joe still had their backs turned towards him; the third man was hidden by the curved top of the transverse bulkhead.

Drawing his knees up, Dick contrived to reach his stocking top with his hands, notwithstanding the fact that his wrists were bound. Cautiously he withdrew the case and dropped it down into the bilges.

As it fell it gave out a metallic sound audible above the noise of the motor. For a moment the patrol leader wondered whether the bandits had heard it.

Apparently they hadn't, for neither of the men for'ard turned his head.

Presently, in response to Redbeard's orders, Joe turned, and, stepping over Dick's body, stood by the reverse lever.

Under the eyes of his employer Redbeard was going to show how smartly he could bring the boat alongside the *Katharina*. The latter had now stopped her engine and had lost way. The accommodation ladder had been lowered and, for the purpose of getting the cargo of munitions on board, a light derrick had been swung over the side.

Redbeard's idea was to approach at nearly full speed, round-to close to the yacht's side and by reversing smartly, bring the motor-boat to a standstill by the *Katharina's* accommodation ladder.

The latter's skipper did not see eye to eye with the helmsman of the motor-boat.

" Slow down, you blithering son of a sea-cook!" he shouted with a roar like a bull.

That rattled Redbeard completely. He yelled to Joe to put her into reverse. Joe tugged at the reverse lever but without the desired result.

"It's jammed!" he shouted.

"Then switch the engine off," bawled Redbeard, incautiously turning his head to see what the man was doing.

That did it!

Even in that brief instant the motor-boat gave a slight turn to port. Before Redbeard could grasp the situation and swing the wheel hard to starboard her stem crashed almost head on against the *Katharina's* side. There was a hideous splintering of wood as her bows crumpled under the impact. Water poured in like a mill-race. It was merely a matter of seconds before the motor-boat sank.

Regardless of everyone else, Redbeard made a flying jump for the accommodation ladder, missed it and disappeared beneath the surface with a huge splash.

Though hampered by his bonds Dick struggled to his feet to help his sister; but Joyce had already grasped a bowline thrown by one of the yacht's crew. She was waiting to see if her brother was in danger.

"Up you go, miss, I'll see to him!" exclaimed the man who had been lying down aft.

Whipping out his knife, he severed the cords binding Dick's hands and assisted him into the loop of another bowline. Then he and Joe sprang for the yacht's rail as she heeled to the long swell, and scrambled inboard.

As they did so the motor-boat sank, leaving Joyce and Dick suspended in mid-air by the bowlines. As the patrol leader was being hauled up he caught sight of Redbeard, who was an indifferent swimmer, struggling " in the ditch ".

" Let him soak a bit," said a voice from the bridge. " It'll do the fool good."

So they let him swallow a generous amount of the Irish Sea before throwing the bandit a rope, by which time Dick found himself standing on deck with his sister.

True to his Sea Scout's training, the patrol leader's first thought was to take rough bearings of the yacht's position. Somewhat to his surprise—for while in the motor-boat he was unable to look over the side—he found that the yacht had closed the land considerably, and although she was three or four miles from Haunted Harbour she was within a couple of cables' lengths of the western arm of the bay.

There were two admirable bearings: one, the Middle Rat just open off the cliffs at Porth Tyddyn; the other the whitewashed tower of Try-groes almost its own width clear of the chimney of the disused copper-mine at Hafod-bryn.

Actually it meant that the yacht was over the Calf Bank when the motor-boat sank alongside, to settle in four fathoms on a sandy bed. There too, easily recoverable by diving operations, was the metal case. No safer hiding-place—one in which chance had been the deciding factor—could have been found.

The metal case, Dick felt certain, had been the instrument of its own salvation. When he dropped it through a crack in the bottom boards the lurching of the boat had sent it between the quadrants of the reverse-gear. That was the cause of the metallic clank he had heard.

Then when Joe attempted to thrust the lever back in order to go astern the metal case was jammed, thus preventing the mechanism from working. That was how the motor-boat came to crash, with disastrous results to herself, against the *Katharina's* side.

" This way, you two!"

The gruff voice of a uniformed man curtly bade Dick and his sister to follow him.

" In there!"

The man pointed to the open door of what was evidently the bosun's store-room. In it there were coils of rope, tins of paint, brushes, mops and about a third of a large galvanized iron tank that, shaped to the ship's side, projected through the fore and aft bulkhead into the adjoining compartment—the galley.

Of clear floor space there was but about six feet by four. The only ventilation was by means of a louvred grating in the door. A feeble light came in through a frosted glass " bull's eye " flush with the deck overhead.

Into this cell—it was little more—they were ordered. The door was then shut and bolted on the outside.

" Rotten quarters," commented Joyce. " How long do they think they're going to keep us here?"

" I hope they'll let you out soon in any case," replied Dick. " I'm not grousing. I jolly well deserve it for what I've done "

"What have you done, then?"

"There is a case containing a State secret——"

"Yes, the one you told Mr. Dangerfield about when you signalled."

"I sneaked it from the smugglers' cave. I had it when we were picked up by the motor-boat. It went down when she sank. Now listen carefully, Joyce. I don't think they'll detain you long. When you're released, inform Mr. Dangerfield that the case is jammed under the bottom boards of the motor-boat and she's sunk on Calf Bank. Here are the bearings."

He gave them very carefully and asked his sister to repeat them, so that there could be no mistake.

"You'll have to memorize them," he added. "It won't be safe to write them down."

By this time, judging by the rumble of the propeller shaft, the yacht was again under way. Brother and sister had spent the best part of an hour discussing the situation and how it had arisen, when the door was thrown open and they were curtly told to come out.

This time they were taken into the owner's cabin where Michael Apulgrab, looking as black as a thundercloud, awaited them.

"Now, you meddlesome young brats," he began without any preliminaries, "you've done quite enough mischief to-day. I know all about you. I'm a man of action, not words, and if you try to thwart me, may heaven have mercy upon you, for I won't. Tell me: where have you hidden that case?"

CHAPTER XIX

The Ferret Catches a Tartar

Mr. Dangerfield, made very anxious by the unexpected trend of events, went down to the beach to meet the returning boats. He had seen that their desperate efforts to effect the rescue of the biplane's crew had been unsuccessful and that Dick and his sister had been snatched up by the smugglers' motor-boat. More than that, he had watched the power-craft speed seawards and eventually run alongside the mysterious yacht.

The distance, however, had been too great for the S.M. to witness the foundering of the motor-boat alongside the *Katharina*. So far as he knew, the two Hargreaves were now on board that craft.

"Hadn't a chance against that motor-boat, sir," reported the patrol leader of the Hawks.

"You did your best," agreed Mr. Dangerfield. "All right; haul both boats above high-water mark. We'll have to telegraph to Dick's people and to New Scotland Yard."

Then he remembered the letters given him by Courtney Mills to post at noon if the Secret Service man hadn't returned. It was now nearly four.

Since, apparently, the occupants of the wrecked aeroplane were safe, it was no use, he decided, to alarm their parents unduly; so he merely stated on the telegraph form that the machine had met with an accident and that Dick and Joyce had been taken on board a passing yacht and would probably be landed at Holyhead that evening.

The telegram to New Scotland Yard was longer. Not possessing a code, the S.M. had to send the message *en clair*:

" From Dangerfield C/o P.O. Camlytch. Mills absent since last night, whereabouts unknown. Forwarding his dispatch by express letter. G. dispersing. Some taken off by yacht, name unknown, white hull, buff upperworks, two masts, one funnel cream with black top. Last seen proceeding westward towards North Stacks."

That was all he dare say. " G ", he hoped would be enough to indicate the gang. Scotland Yard would act promptly. The Customs officers and the Coast Watchers on the Welsh and Irish coasts would keep a sharp lookout for any craft answering to the S.M.'s somewhat meagre description of the yacht; the Admiralty would order destroyers to go in search of the gun-running vessel and in a very short time the widespread net would be set to catch these daring law-breakers.

" Hi, Blacklock!" shouted the S.M.

" Sir?" asked the Sea Scout, as he came running up.

" Take these to the post office. Matterson can go with you if he cares to. There won't be an answer yet awhile, so get back as sharp as you can. And while you're in the town get me a couple of ounces of Bruno tobacco, will you?"

. . . .

About the same time as the two Sea Scouts were on their way to the post office Courtney Mills was making desperate efforts to free himself from his bonds.

He had recovered consciousness about an hour earlier, to find himself manacled by his own handcuffs, lashed by his ankles and in addition secured to the wall by a rope.

He was alone. He had no idea where he was, beyond the fact that he was in a circular building and was lying on what remained of the floor. That he had been visited recently was evident by a bowl of water and some slices of brown bread placed close to him.

His throat was like a limekiln. He drank avidly, lapping like a dog, since his manacled hands prevented his raising the bowl to his lips. After that he munched some of the bread and felt better for it. But how his head throbbed!

Then he tried to get to the deeply-recessed opening that once had been a window, but the rope stopped him.

He looked at his wrist-watch. It had stopped at ten o'clock. He was in the habit of winding it at eight every morning.

" Must have been here fifteen or sixteen hours," he thought. " Been slugged too. Robbery couldn't have been the motive or they would have taken my watch.

. . . Ah! now I remember. They knocked me over the head when we were scrapping on the lorry!"

That was most unfortunate. It probably meant that the smugglers, having rendered him unconscious, had driven him for several miles before depositing him in this building. Where was it? They'd mentioned they were going to return to Birmingham. Perhaps this was some partly ruined place belonging to the unscrupulous firm that was supplying the illegal consignment of arms for export.

Yes, it was most unfortunate! He meant to regain his liberty somehow; but hoped that he would be in the neighbourhood of the Faucet Inn. Then, with the aid of the Sea Scouts and the local police—even if his colleagues from the Yard hadn't arrived at Haunted Harbour—he would effect the capture of the gang redhanded.

The first thing to be done was to free himself from some of his bonds. He could not hope to unfasten or even snap the handcuffs, but the ropes—yes!

His captors had apparently lashed his ankles and secured him to the wall by a rope merely as a precautionary measure against his falling over the edge of the floor while in a semi-conscious state. They hadn't even secured his handcuffed wrists to his waist, in which case he would have been helpless.

Lying on his side and bending his knees, he was able to bring his ankles within reach of his fingers. It meant working almost entirely by his sense of touch. The cords were tightly knotted, but after a few minutes his legs were free.

Then he tackled the rope. Unable to get at the knot where it was secured round his waist, he set to work to untie the one that held the rope to a staple in the wall. That, too, presented little difficulty.

He was free to move, though still hampered by the steel " bracelets ". Thus handicapped, he realized that it was impossible to climb upon the sill of the window. It was equally out of the question to jump over the edge of the semi-circular platform that was all that remained of the floor, for on looking down he found that there was a similar floor ten feet below leaving a sheer drop of about twenty-five or thirty feet to the base of the tower, which he rightly guessed to be a disused mill.

To jump, manacled as he was, would result in a broken neck—and a Secret Service man with a dislocated vertebral column was of precious little use to New Scotland Yard, unless the finding of the body provided some useful clue!

Continuing his investigations, Mills noticed a stout knotted rope made fast to a beam where it joined the stonework of the building. It was hanging loosely, its lower ends in a rough coil on a heap of brushwood at the bottom of the tower.

That looked promising. He wondered whether it would be possible to use it as a means of escape, grasping it firmly with his handcuffed hands and letting himself down gently. He rather doubted it. The weight of his body would probably force his arms backwards and tear the muscles, besides snapping his collar-bone.

Even that risk might be well worth while to enable him to continue the best traditions of the Force and effect the arrest of the gang.

While he was peering down into the depth he noticed a movement of the rubbish on the lowermost floor. Then a trap-door was cautiously opened.

Courtney Mills silently backed away from the edge. Then hastily securing the end of the rope that had secured him through the staple he laid himself down at full length in the same place in which he had been when he recovered consciousness. The cords that had bound his legs he wrapped round his ankles, bringing the turns alternately over and under so that they had the appearance of being securely fastened.

Presently, by the vibration of the rickety floor and by the sound of heavy breathing, the Secret Service man knew that someone was ascending to the second storey by means of the knotted rope.

The face of the man appeared over the ledge. Then he heaved himself up and regained his feet.

Courtney Mills recognized him as Bill the 'Longshoreman, known to the rest of the gang as The Ferret and to The Yard under half a dozen aliases.

The Ferret was in a nasty mood. He had just returned from a visit to the secret cave to find out from the few remaining members of the gang what had happened. Their report was gloomy enough, in all conscience!

The motor-boat had not only failed to return with the Sea Scout who had contrived to filch the metal case containing the KI, but it had put off to the *Katha-*

rina and had not been seen since. The obvious explanation—although it was an erroneous one—was that Apulgrab had taken off the men with the Sea Scout they had rescued from the aeroplane and had found the secret KI in the latter's possession. That and the remainder of the arms consignment being all he wanted, Apulgrab had taken the boat's crew aboard and had put to sea, leaving the rest of the gang—no longer likely to be of further use to him—to their own devices!

" And the Boss has double-crossed you too," declared one of the disillusioned men.

The Ferret had to admit that it was so and advised the rest of the gang to remain where they were until after dark and then escape by means of the tunnel, either to the inn or else to the Old Mill.

" I'm off away back there now," he added. " We'll have to make sure that nark won't be released until we're well clear. He was still blind to the world when I left there."

The Secret Service man and the master criminal eyed one another in silence for some moments.

" Well, feeling better after your rest?" asked The Ferret sarcastically. " Bright lad, you are, to take a stretch off the land for the best part of a whole day when you ought to be gaining promotion."

" I'll get that yet," replied Courtney Mills. " When I've cleared up you and your nice crowd! My advice to you is to give in gracefully, unfasten these bracelets and accompany me to Camlytch police station. Your assistance in getting me out of this hole will be taken into consideration by the judge."

" If I take your advice I'll be taking the advice of a young fool, Mister Courtney Mills!" exclaimed The Ferret. Like his fellow-bandit Redbeard, he couldn't help crowing over his victim, but, unlike him, he embellished his boasts with lies. " You see, I know who you are and what you are. You're after that KI. You didn't know I had it and was watching you from a tree five yards away when you were searching for it in that wrecked car? You don't know that one of those nosey-Parker Sea Scouts pinched it from us? That we nabbed him with it on him and that he's now a prisoner on the high seas? That KI will go where the Boss—Apulgrab's his name, if you don't know it—wants it to go; and fetch a king's ransom?"

The Ferret paused to see the effect of this highly exaggerated statement. Since Apulgrab had " double crossed " him it would be getting a bit of his own back to let the 'tec know the name of the arch-villain of the piece.

With a cunning leer on his face The Ferret drew a cigarette case from his pocket.

" Have one?" he invited. " No? Sorry, I forgot I'd fixed the darbies on you. Mind if I smoke?"

He put the end of a cigarette to his lips and struck a match.

Even as he did so, Courtney Mills leapt to his feet and with haunched shoulders hurled himself against the fellow, who, dazzled by the glare of the match, was unaware of the impending onslaught until it was too late.

With a sickening thud The Ferret measured his length on the floor. The Secret Service man rolled clear and regained his feet.

The lighted cigarette had fallen through a crack in the floor and lay smouldering upon the dry brushwood and other litter thirty feet below.

The Secret Service man looked rather gloomily at the result of his sudden, almost unpremeditated, attack. He had overstepped the bounds of duty in laying out an unresisting lawbreaker, and apparently he had used unnecessary force.

The Ferret lay on his back, breathing stertorously. Blood was showing on his lips and welling from his nostrils. He had not only been " put to sleep " but was probably almost certainly suffering from concussion of the brain.

Courtney Mills's first act was to pick up the bowl—that required a gymnastic contortion—and pour the remainder of the water over the face of the unconscious man. Next to summon assistance—but how?

Handcuffed, he couldn't lower himself by the rope, nor could he raise himself sufficiently to reach the window sill.

He was still racking his brains to find a way when in the distance he heard voices.

Blacklock and Matterson were on their way back to camp. Ignoring their S.M.'s instructions, they were returning by a roundabout way that took them within a hundred yards of the Old Mill, and then—

also against orders, for the boys had been forbidden to ramble amongst the partly demolished buildings—they took it into their heads to do a bit of exploring on their own account.

Courtney Mills was almost certain that the voices he could hear were those of some of the Sea Scouts. No local youths spoke in those accents.

"Sea Scouts ahoy!" he shouted.

At first there was no reply.

He shouted again.

"What is it?" replied Blacklock.

"I'm a prisoner in here," announced The Yard man. "I want you to inform Mr. Dangerfield. Bring a ladder and a stretcher. Be as sharp as you can!"

Twice that afternoon this pair of Sea Scouts had been enjoined to bestir themselves. This time they did. They ran as hard as they could and gave their S.M. the startling message.

Now was a chance to show what the troop could do. Several had heard Blacklock's report; others were summoned by a blast on the S.M.'s whistle.

Quickly but without fuss they "fell in" and awaited orders—each patrol under its patrol leader, except the Otters, and they would have given much to know where he was!

Briefly Mr. Dangerfield gave his instructions.

The Hawks and the Kestrels, because they had had a gruelling time in the boats, were told off to remain on guard in camp. The Eagles were to hurry into Camlytch to summon the police and fetch Dr. Morgan. Why a doctor? Because Courtney Mills had asked for a stretcher to be brought. The Otters, in charge of Second Jimmy Cotton, were to proceed with the S.M. to the Old Mill; while the Eels, since no ladder was available, were to go down to the beach and bring along two masts, some rope and the yawl's lug-sail.

The Scoutmaster had only just finished giving his orders, and was about to dispatch the various patrols to their respective tasks when Ginger Smith suddenly exclaimed:

" Look, sir, the Old Mill's on fire!"

CHAPTER XX

Rescued from the Flames

There was a spontaneous movement in the well-ordered patrols—an uncontrollable instinct to rush to the ruined tower, through the open roof and windows of which thin trails of smoke were issuing.

" Troop-alert!" ordered the S.M.

Discipline prevailed. Every boy stood rigid, looking straight in front of him yet aching to turn his head in the direction of the fire.

" Carry on!"

A general rush to the Old Mill in an attempt to rescue the Secret Service man would only have defeated its own object. Of what use could the Sea Scouts be if unprovided with gear for their task?

The patrols detailed to remain accepted the trying condition cheerfully. After all, they were spectators and as such might see most of the game—a gamble with death.

The others hurried to their respective duties, the depleted Otter Patrol proceeding straight to the Old Mill.

So far, the fire had not gained much strength. Started by The Ferret's lighted cigarette falling upon the rubbish on the ground-floor, it had quickly thrown out an alarming volume of black smoke. There was the danger of the prisoners being suffocated; but until the smouldering debris burst into flames, fanned by the up-draught through the open top of the building, the woodwork of the upper stories would not be attacked. When they were, the whole structure would collapse.

There was no water available except the contents of two canvas buckets. The tidal harbour, a quarter of a mile away, was dry. All the Sea Scouts could hope to do was to rescue Courtney Mills and leave the Old Mill to its fate.

Until the climbing gear was forthcoming the difficulty lay in locating the exact whereabouts of the captured Yard man. Wilson and Harvey, wearing wetted scarves over their mouths, made a determined attempt to enter through a small doorway on the ground-floor after the Otters had broken in the decaying woodwork with a beam that was lying about.

The smoke was too thick for them to see much; while the heat from the glowing mass of debris singed their hair. They had to beat a retreat, armed with the knowledge that there was no one there.

Courtney Mills must be somewhere up in the building, but although above the roar of the fire the Otters heard his voice shouting they could not locate him.

Quickly the Eels arrived, almost breathless with their smart work of unshipping the masts and other gear and carrying them over the rough up-hill ground.

Under Mr. Dangerfield's direction one of the masts was placed against the side of the building with its truck just above the sill of one of the second-storey windows.

Without hesitation Jimmy Cotton, his mouth protected by his scarf, swarmed up. The Second was a " star turn " when it came to going aloft, and now he was putting his qualification to practical use.

While his chums steadied the mast to prevent it from twisting and slipping, Jimmy " shinned up " in grand style, threw one leg over the sill and after a moment's hesitation disappeared within the recess.

Ginger Smith then followed, with orders not to enter the building, but to act as a link between the Second and the rest of the rescue party.

He peered into the smoke-filled building and then looked down upon the up-turned faces of his chums.

" There's two of them in there!" he shouted. " Jimmy's lugging one out now!"

That was what Ginger thought the Second was doing. Actually the half-suffocated Secret Service man was endeavouring to let his rescuer know that he wouldn't be helped to safety before the unconscious Redpole was got out.

It took some time for the Second to realize that there was someone else; that he was to all appearances a corpse, and that Courtney Mills was hampered by having his wrists handcuffed.

" Ask them to throw up a rope, Ginger!" he called out, temporarily removing his scarf. " Tell them to hurry. It's getting too thick here!"

Quickly a rope was thrown into Smith's hands. Making a bowline in it he passed one end down to

Cotton who slipped it under the shoulders of the senseless bandit.

Between them they hauled The Ferret to the sill, then, checking the descent, lowered him to the ground.

For some seconds no one there recognized the man, but they now knew why a stretcher was required.

"Why, it's Bill the 'Longshoreman!" exclaimed Blacklock.

It was now Courtney Mills's turn. Ginger tugged at his coat-collar, while the Second, gasping for breath heaved at his legs. Between them they got him on to the broad sill. Jimmy Cotton scrambled up after him.

There the three remained huddled together in the narrow space, while a short distance behind them lurid flames shot, crackling and sparkling, towards the open sky.

Now came the other Sea Scouts' opportunity. Ten stout pairs of hands gripped the sail that had been brought from the yawl.

"Jump, sir!" urged Ginger.

But Courtney Mills was too much overcome by the smoke.

Between them, Cotton and Smith settled the problem by pushing him, handcuffed as he was, into space—vigorously, in order to project him clear of the truncated side of the building.

Fairly into the centre of the tightly-stretched canvas he bounced.

"Steady, there!" cautioned Mr. Dangerfield. "He's fainted. We'll want another stretcher, I fancy!"

Then Cotton leapt to safety, while Ginger, mainly to show his chums that he was quite capable of saving himself, slid down the mast.

Even as he did so there was a terrific crash. The skeleton timbers that once had supported the roof had collapsed, carrying with them the rotting floor on which the Second had been standing only a couple of minutes before!

By this time quite a crowd had gathered. Men, women and children from Camlytch Port, most of the few inhabitants of Haunted Harbour, and a number of holiday makers, had appeared upon the scene. For once, the Old Mill's sinister reputation had been forgotten.

" But what's happened to him?" asked one, pointing to the Secret Service man's wrists. " He's handcuffed!"

" Why, there's 'Longshoreman Bill—him that lodges at the Faucet Inn," declared another. " What does it all mean?"

Several of the Haunted Harbour folk might have been able to supply the answer. Wisely, perhaps, they remained silent.

Then Dr. Morgan arrived just as Courtney Mills was recovering consciousness. He was followed by a sergeant and a constable of the Anglesey police.

" I'm all right, really," persisted Courtney. " See you arrest that man, sergeant, when he recovers. I've a warrant for him. Dangerfield, tell them to carry me down to the camp, please."

" Right," replied the S.M. " And we'll soon get those handcuffs off with a hack-saw!"

A grin appeared upon the smoke-blackened face of the Secret Service man.

" No fear!" he rejoined. " Wilful damage to police property! If you look, I think you'll find the key in 'Longshoreman Bill's pocket!"

. . . .

About ten o'clock that night, while Courtney Mills was lying on his camp-bed, painfully aware of an unsightly swelling on the top of his head, five of the gang, hungry and dejected, left the secret cave for the last time.

Disillusioned—even to the extent that they were under the impression that The Ferret had played them false—they stole along the low tunnel, guided only by the flickering of a battered oil-lantern.

The work upon which they had been engaged was finished. The last of the smuggled munitions had left in the motor-boat when she started for the rescue and capture of the crew of the crippled aeroplane. She hadn't returned to take the remainder of the gang to the *Katharina*, on board of which they were to have been paid, to be later landed in a healthier locality.

Apulgrab had double crossed them; so had The Ferret, even though he had warned them to clear out of the district soon after dark.

They had decided not to gain the open by means of the cellar under the Faucet Inn, but to take the shorter subterranean route that opened under the ground-floor of the Old Mill.

Arriving at the bottom of the vertical shaft, they halted, aware of an unusually high temperature in the normally cold and dank passage.

One of them ascended, after being warned to exercise great caution in opening the trap-door; but when he placed his hand on the underside of the flap he gave an exclamation of pain.

"Crikey! It's hot!" he announced to his pals below. "The ironwork burnt my hand, it did!"

"Wot's The Ferret been doin' then?"

"Dunno!"

"Give it another shove up!"

"You jolly well have a go at it! I've had enough," declared the victim emphatically.

"Hurry up; this lamp won't keep alight much longer!" exclaimed another.

The first man descended. Another climbed the rungs and prised against the trap-door with his knife.

"It's stuck fast," he declared. "An' the whole caboodle's burning!"

To emphasize the truth of his words, the wooden part of the flap bulged ominously. Charred wood dropped upon the heads of the men below.

An exit through the Old Mill was denied them. It was misfortune following misfortune. They blamed The Ferret for this latest set-back, declaring that he must have set the building on fire out of sheer devilment.

There was no help for it but to make for the door leading into the cellar of the inn. Of the three bolt-holes from their secret cave two were already closed against them. The seaward one was impossible to them since the patrol leader had cut away their rope-ladder and then the motor-boat had put off without them. The shaft to the mill was, as they had just discovered, blocked by a mass of burning wood.

In single file the smugglers set out on the last lap of their underground journey. Hardly a word was spoken except for an occasional curt injunction to the lantern-bearer to 'ware this or that obstruction.

At length the yellow gleam played upon the barred door of the cellar of the inn.

The men set to work to unfasten the rusty bolts. The workmen who, centuries before, had fashioned the bolts and that massive door had done their work well. Nothing short of explosives would have made short work of it.

The heavy oak swung slowly on its hinges. As the smugglers had expected, the cellar was in darkness. They would have to give the pre-arranged signal to the landlord before he lifted the stone slab to enable them to leave the place.

Suddenly, as the last of the five crossed the threshold, the cellar was flooded with dazzling, even blinding light.

Half a dozen plain-clothes detectives and four uniformed constables had contrived a cleverly laid trap.

The smugglers submitted to be handcuffed without offering resistance.

. . . .

Ten minutes later Courtney Mills received his colleagues' report of the arrests.

It was well worth while—that bump on his head, he mused; but he hoped for other things before he could put " paid " to the account.

CHAPTER XXI

The "Katharina" Changes Hands

Michael Apulgrab had got very little change out of his captives. In fact, in his efforts to wrest from them any definite information concerning the missing KI he had to admit to himself that he had drawn blank.

He gave orders for them to be searched and then put back into the " Glory-hole ".

" That young cub is as stubborn as a mule, captain," he declared to the skipper of the *Katharina* after Dick and Joyce had been removed from his cabin. " As for that girl, there's a look in her eyes that I don't like. Give her half a chance to make mischief and she'll clutch at it with both hands."

" Maybe," rejoined the captain drily. " But with all due respect to you as my employer, I'm dashed if I'll keep the girl down there. It isn't common humanity. I'll get Hayes to fix up one of those unoccupied cabins aft for her."

" All right," growled Apulgrab grudgingly. " The boy stops, of course. But, look here, captain, I'm not going to let that girl off lightly. She'll stop in the glory-hole for another couple of hours, just to show how we tame unruly pups of either sex."

It was fairly apparent that the first officer, to whom fell the task of searching the prisoners, had no liking for his unpleasant task. He certainly searched Dick pretty thoroughly, removing his knife, purse and pocket-diary—the latter being almost pulped by immersion in salt water. But he contented himself by letting Joyce turn out her pockets, and, having retained her pilot's licence, allowed her to keep her handbag and its contents, and waved his hand when she drew a sodden mass of leaves from the pocket of her flying-coat.

" No use to us and precious little use to you, miss," he remarked. " Better hang on to them or else toss them overboard."

Again brother and sister found themselves alone and in semi-darkness in the bosun's storeroom.

They discussed the situation and speculated upon their chances of release, until a metallic clank almost overhead interrupted their conversation.

" What's that noise?" asked Joyce.

" Fresh water pump, I think," replied Dick. " There's one end of the tank. They pump the water up to the galley."

" What for?"

" To drink, I suppose; make tea and cocoa for the crew and all that sort of thing."

For a few moments Joyce remained silent, thinking hard. Then in the half light she examined what was visible of the tank.

There was a circular hole about six inches in diameter in the top of the tank, secured by a threaded metal cover. In the deck-head immediately above was a similar opening. When both were open the tank could be filled by means of a hose from a hydrant when the yacht lay alongside a quay or took in water from a supply-vessel.

" Dick," she declared earnestly, " I'm going to do something that may be the means of our regaining our freedom. If it does, well and good; if it doesn't, you can't be blamed. See my point?"

" But I may be blamed, and so much the better."

" I don't think so. Now look the other way for a minute. I'll tell you when I've done."

More with a desire to humour his sister than from any faith in what she was about to do, he faced the opposite bulkhead.

Deftly with the aid of an iron shackle Joyce unscrewed the metal cap. The tank appeared to be about three quarters full, but it was a mere guess on the girl's part as the water was slopping to and fro from the motion of the yacht.

Then, drawing from her pocket the damp bunch of leaves and foliage—most of the berries had been squashed—that was all that remained of her specimen of the Cws-g Flodyn—the Flower of Sleep—she forced the sodden mass through the filling-hole into the tank.

" I wonder how long that will take to dope the water," she thought. " And what if the drug is too strong?"

She replaced the cap.

" I've finished, Dick," she announced.

"What have you done?" asked the patrol leader curiously.

"Never mind! Do you think we shall be able to open the door?"

"It's locked."

"I know. If we used one of those mop handles we could smash that big ventilator in the door."

"We might."

"We could—and when it's torn away we could squeeze through the gap."

A few minutes later the chief officer appeared.

"I'm having you shifted, miss," he said civilly. "The owner's agreed to let you have a cabin to yourself aft, provided you don't try to get into mischief."

"I won't promise that," rejoined Joyce. "In fact, I'm sure I would; so perhaps I'd better stop here. But when's tea? We're hungry."

The clank of the water pump started.

"Tea's at five o'clock for all hands."

"Do we have the same tea as the crew, then?" inquired Joyce.

"Why not?" countered the first officer. "We of the afterguard do. What's good enough for us is good enough for you, miss."

"I suppose it is," conceded the girl sweetly. "You'll see we get a good meal, won't you, captain."

"I'm not the skipper, miss, I'm the chief officer—or chief mate, if you like. What's in a name anyway, provided the pay's right? I'll send the scoff along in about three-quarters of an hour."

The minutes passed slowly and almost in silence.

Dick, though he wanted to ask for information, knew it wouldn't be of much use when once his sister had made up her mind.

On her part Joyce was wondering how her scheme would work out—whether the water now boiling in the galley had been sufficiently impregnated with the extract from the "Flower of Sleep" to have the desired effect.

Presently the door was flung open and a seaman appeared with a tray on which were two cups of tea, a pile of thick bread and butter and two slabs of cherry cake.

These he set down on the deck and went out, locking the door after him.

"Tea—topping!" ejaculated Dick.

"No you don't, Dick!" protested Joyce. "You're not to drink it! Eat the cake and bread and butter if you like, but don't touch the tea!"

"Why not?"

"Because you're not to!"

. . . .

On the bridge the chief officer was gratefully gulping down the refreshing beverage. Standing at the wheel, the quartermaster had finished his cup, and, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, silently expressed the opinion that he could do with more.

. . . .

In the fo'c'sle the watch below and those of the duty watch who could be spared from the deck were moping down their tea from tin pannikins. They had had a fairly strenuous afternoon and their dinner hour had been interrupted by the appearance and sinking of the smugglers' motor-boat.

The rescued men were also imbibing tea and wishing that it was something stronger.

. . . .

"Your tea, sir!"

Michael Apulgrab, seated in the cabin and going through a list of documents concerning his illegal cargo, glanced up at the steward standing in the doorway.

"Take it away!" he exclaimed churlishly. "Take the stuff away and bring me a whisky and soda!"

. . . .

Another hour passed. Dick had thrown himself on the deck, his shoulders resting against a coil of rope. He was dozing, tired out by the events of a most trying day.

Not so Joyce.

She was standing alert, listening to the sounds that came from without and steadying herself with one hand against the door to counteract the heavy rolling of the yacht.

Yes, although the rumble of the propeller and the swish of the waves against the yacht's bows were still as pronounced as before she missed the occasional tramp of feet on deck and the rarer sounds of voices.

She could wait no longer. She simply must see what effect the Flower of Sleep was having—have some sort of result it certainly would!

"Dick, Dick!" she exclaimed. "Wake up and bear a hand."

" What do you want?" he asked drowsily.

For an instant Joyce had a suspicion that her brother had drunk some of the tea after all, but a glance at the two cups showed that their contents had been untouched although a small quantity had been slopped as the yacht rolled.

" They're all sound asleep," she declared.

" How do you know? Why should they be?"

" Don't ask questions. Now, let's smash that panel as quickly as we can!"

The teak louvre soon gave under the thrust of the stout mop-handle. It seemed to the patrol leader as if the noise of shattering woodwork was enough to wake the Seven Sleepers.

But no irate officer or man appeared to threaten them for wilfully damaging the yacht's fittings.

Looking out, Joyce saw that the deck was deserted.

" All clear!" she announced. " You go first, Dick. You'll have to give me a hand!"

Although the aperture was roughly only fifteen inches square the patrol leader squeezed through until his hands touched the deck. Then with a half somersault he got the rest of his body clear and regained his feet.

From where he stood he could see the greater part of the bridge. Normally the head and shoulders of the helmsman ought to be visible above the after-bridge screens. All he could see was a man's arm projecting between the bottom of the canvas and the edge of the bridge.

Restraining his impulse to make further investigations

—for all feeling of drowsiness had now left him—the Sea Scout helped his sister to scramble out.

Together they went on the bridge.

Here they found the chief officer lying on his side, an empty cup still grasped in his fingers. A few feet away lay the quartermaster, his face with a happy smile on it, staring sightlessly into the sky.

"What's happened to them?" asked Dick.

"I've doped them," replied Joyce. "We'll have to find out what's happened to the rest. . . . Where ought the captain to be?"

They discovered that worthy in his cabin under the bridge. He hadn't the grace to fall asleep quietly even though he was within three feet of his bunk. He had fallen sideways from his chair and in falling had grabbed the tablecloth. In spite of the table being fitted with fiddles the tea things had descended like a miniature avalanche upon the unconscious man responsible for the navigation and safety of the steam-yacht *Katharina*.

"Nip down and see what's happened to the others," commanded Joyce, who had taken command of the situation. "Give a shout if you want me."

Dick slid down the ladder and went for'ard.

The double-doors to the fore-peak were open, and, not being secured to the bulkhead, were swaying to and fro with each roll of the yacht, which was still steaming at about eight knots and describing an enormous curve to starboard.

Fortunately she had plenty of sea-room. Her captain, anticipating trouble from the naval authorities, had set a course westward in the direction of the Irish coast until the Isle of Anglesey had dipped beneath the horizon. Then he had steered due north for an hour before again altering course towards the Lancashire coast. Here the *Katharina*, somewhat disguised, would not excite suspicion, since pleasure craft were " common objects of the seashore " off Southport and Blackpool. Then the yacht would shape a course for the Clyde, until, under favourable conditions, she could make a dash for the Atlantic, and then proceed southwards off the west coast of Ireland.

Unfortunately for these plans Joyce's use of the Cws-g Flodyn—the Flower of Sleep—had literally and figuratively upset the captain and most of the crew.

Peering down into the ill-lighted forepeak, Dick saw a strange sight. There were about eighteen men—including those picked up from the motor-boat—lying in all sorts of weird attitudes. Some were propped up against the double range of bunks, their heads rolling with the movement of the yacht. Others lay in heaps upon the deck. Three had tried to make their way out before being overtaken by the effect of the drug and were jammed against the short iron ladder.

" What if Joyce has done the lot in?" thought the patrol leader.

" Well?" hailed his sister from the bridge. " Hurry up, we're going round and round—at least the yacht is."

" All blind to the world!"

" Splendid! Anyone else—the steward?"

"I'll see."

"I'll come with you. I can't do much up here."

They made their way aft, stopping at the engine-room fidley. Through the steamy atmosphere they discovered that the staff were still carrying on in bliss-ful ignorance of the plight of the others.

There were three men below—one, evidently the chief engineer, sitting in his shirt sleeves on a platform facing the telegraph and pressure-gauge indicators. Since the engine- and boiler-rooms were in one, the two firemen could be seen. One was shovelling coal into one of the furnaces; the other was drinking from a pannikin.

It was the work of a moment to close the iron door giving access to the engine-room and to secure it by means of a cross-bar. Dick hoped that the men below hadn't partaken of the doped tea. They would be wanted to keep the engine running. Already he had decided upon a somewhat vainglorious scheme of bringing the captured yacht into Haunted Harbour.

The steward they discovered with the cook, both sound asleep in the galley. They, too, were secured by locking the door.

"Where's that blighter, the owner of the yacht?" asked Dick.

"In his cabin, I expect."

They knew their way there only too well. Not so very long ago they were being hectored by the lawless Apulgrab. Now the tables were turned.

Cautiously they made a preliminary survey through the scuttle.

Apulgrab wasn't asleep. He was still reading. A tray containing a siphon and a half-emptied glass stood by his elbow.

It was a difficult situation. There were no means of securing the door. Apulgrab might be armed; yet the *Katharina* wasn't theirs until they had secured the owner.

"I'll have to tackle him," whispered the patrol leader. "He'll be taken by surprise. If he gets the better of me, give him a gentle tap with this"—pointing to a belaying-pin in the mainmast fife-rail—"but don't put too much vim into it!"

Joyce unshipped the belaying-pin and tested its balance. Then, softly opening the sliding door and pulling aside the curtain, Dick stepped into Apulgrab's cabin.

Somewhat to his relief the fellow jumped to his feet. It gave the man more of a sporting chance—not that he deserved it.

But Apulgrab was taken by surprise. For a moment he was under the impression that the captain had brought his prisoners back in a chastened mood, ready to blab about the whereabouts of the elusive KI.

Then, when he did discover his mistake, his hand went to his hip-pocket.

The movement was quite enough for Dick.

He sprang forward. His left fist caught the fellow a beautifully-timed straight to the point.

Apulgrab lost all present interest in his activities. He measured his length on the deck, almost covered with the papers that had slid from the table.

"That was a good one," said the matter-of-fact Joyce.

"Had to be!" rejoined her brother with a cheerful grin. "Help me to lash him up."

They secured his wrists and ankles, using the table napery for the purpose. Then, having found the key of the cabin door, they locked the unconscious man in.

Securing the skylight over the cabin—the only other means by which he might make his way out, so far as they were aware—they proceeded with the lengthy and difficult task of what Dick described as "clearing decks".

This consisted of lowering the soundly sleeping chief officer and two seamen from the bridge to the deck, whence, together with the equally somnolent skipper, they were lowered into the forepeak.

The double doors were then properly secured, and the two Hargreaves were now able to enjoy a little breathing space.

The *Katharina* was theirs!

CHAPTER XXII

Back to Haunted Harbour

" Where are we, anyway?" asked Joyce, as they regained the bridge.

" Ask me another," replied Dick frankly. " I don't know."

They were out of sight of land, but from the time that had elapsed, they knew they were somewhere in the Irish Sea. Obviously, decided Dick, an east'ard course was the thing, since he concluded that Anglesey lay somewhere in that direction.

They brought the yacht back on the decided course. Actually they were only twenty miles nor'-nor'-east of Haunted Harbour, and this course, if maintained, would bring them in sight of land somewhere in the neighbourhood of Formby Head.

It was now half-past six, at which time the engine-room staff would be relieved.

A whistle in one of the voice-tubes sounded shrilly. The unexpected warning gave Dick a start. Nevertheless he removed the whistle and shouted down the tube to ask what was wanted.

" Bad enough clapping on the fidley hatch," complained an angry voice. " When it comes to forgetting our reliefs it's too much of a good thing. Are you all daft up there, Macmurdo, or what?"

Dick " tumbled to it ". The speaker was the chief engineer, who was very peeved at the non-appearance of the next on-duty men.

" Listen!" he replied. " You're the engineer, I take it?"

" Who else, you loon? What's all this foolin'? Who's that speaking?"

" No fooling—far from it," continued the patrol leader. " The yacht's in our hands—no matter whose. You'll remain on duty to save yourself further trouble. The captain and crew are under arrest and the game's up!"

The chief engineer was a cautious man. Undoubtedly something had occurred, the result of which would be very unpleasant to him as one of the members of a gun-running craft. It would be useless to plead ignorance of the true nature of the *Katharina's* activities.

And yet he was deeply puzzled how the change of command had taken place. He could rule out the possibility of the yacht being captured by the crew of a destroyer, since the engines had been running full ahead all the time. No orders had been given him for " stop " or even " half speed ahead ".

He even contemplated stopping the engines and then seeing what might happen, but thought better of it.

With a surly " Aye, aye, sir; I'll carry on," he accepted the situation.

"There's no grub for us yet awhile, lads!" he announced to the two firemen. "Nor relief either! We're in the cart, it seems, since the ship's changed hands!"

An hour later Dick wasn't feeling quite so confident over his plan to bring the *Katharina* into Haunted Harbour. In forty minutes it would be sunset. The masthead and side lamps were stowed away somewhere and without them it was a risky business barging about in the Irish Sea. Already there were several trails of smoke, betokening the presence of a fairly busy steamer track.

He now thought he was somewhere near the direct run between Kingston and Holyhead, but what he saw was the smoke of vessels either making for or leaving Liverpool.

And Joyce could not help him in his difficulty. Had they been in an aeroplane ten thousand feet up she would have had little difficulty in recognizing the coastline to the south'ard—Great Orme's Head and the mountains of Snowdonia. As it was, even the lofty ranges of Wales were invisible from the bridge.

Reluctantly Dick decided that he must ask for assistance. The yacht's course was altered to converge upon the line of sea-traffic and presently a small cargo boat steaming eastwards was sighted.

"We don't want to hoist the NC," declared the patrol leader, after consulting the International Code of Signals manual. "'Cause we aren't in immediate distress. This'll do. 'Will you assist me?'"

It was some minutes before the stranger hoisted the affirmative pennant close up and altered his course.

Dick then telegraphed for " Half speed astern ", followed by " Stop ". Losing way, the *Katharina*, rolling heavily, stopped at less than half a cable's length from the S.S. *Getaway*.

" What's the trouble?" hailed the latter's skipper.

" Can you lend me a navigator and two hands to work this yacht into Haunted Harbour?"

" How much?"

" What'll you take?"

" Twenty pun' and fares back to Liverpool."

After all, that wasn't much for three men, and eventually Apulgrab would have to " stand the racket " out of the compulsory sale of the yacht.

" Right!"

The Old Man waved his arm.

Promptly a boat was lowered from the *Getaway*. Running alongside the *Katharina*, she placed three men on board and then returned to her parent ship.

" What's the racket?" inquired the *Getaway's* third officer, a youth just out of his apprenticeship.

" Call it mutiny," replied Dick. " We've about twenty of them under hatches."

" H'm, thought it was a film stunt," confessed the third officer, as he stepped to the wheel and ordered " Full speed ahead ". " All right, we'll drop the hook in Camlytch Bay by daybreak. Can't take you right in, 'cause tide don't serve. That'll do, I suppose?"

Dick agreed.

" And what's our present position?" he asked.

" 'Bout thirty miles nor'-nor'-east of Camlytch Bay!"

The patrol leader could have kicked himself. Instead of being well off the dangerous Cardigan Bay, the *Katharina* was a few short miles off where she had been when Joyce and he were picked up. After all, he consoled himself, how was he to know that the yacht had practically retraced her course.

" We'll push along under easy steam," announced the *Katharina's* temporary navigator. " There'll be nought for you to worry about. If those blokes down there start kicking up a shindy I know how to deal with them. If I were you, I'd turn in for a spell. Both of you look as if you could do with it! . . . George! Switch on those masthead and side lights, will you? Switch is in that box just where you're standing!"

. . . .

Actually, owing to a temporary breakdown in the engines—for which her chief engineer was roundly but unjustly blamed—it was not until nine o'clock that the *Katharina* dropped anchor over the Calf Bank and almost on the bearings of the spot where the smugglers' motor-boat had sunk, taking the metal case with it.

The tide now still on the ebb, it would not be possible to enter Haunted Harbour before two in the afternoon; but Dick couldn't wait for that.

" Do you mind a five-mile walk, Joyce?" he asked.

" It depends," replied his sister. " What's the bright idea?"

" One of the *Getaway's* men could put you ashore—it's only a mile to the nearest beach—and then you can go along the cliff path to the camp and tell Mr. Dangerfield we're back, and what's happened. Ask him to get assistance and man every available boat to remove the gang. The troop will like that. The sooner the better, 'cause there's a certain liveliness in the forepeak, I fancy!"

An hour and three-quarters later, Joyce Hargreaves astonished the camp by her unexpected arrival. Their astonishment increased when she announced that the *Katharina* was in the bay and that the crew, including the much-wanted Michael Apulgrab, were under hatches.

One of the most elated people present—although he did not show it—was Courtney Mills. The headache with which he had awakened left him as if by magic.

Quickly, preparations were made to remove the prisoners. The New Scotland Yard men who had had to remain until The Ferret and his part of the gang had been brought before the magistrate and formally committed for trial, were sent for; as many of the local police as could be spared assembled on the beach. Every one of the Sea Scouts' boats was launched and manned, together with half a dozen fishing-boats borrowed from their owners.

To Dick, watching from the bridge of the yacht, the spectacle of the flotilla approaching reminded him of regatta-day. But the boats were then for a very different purpose.

The *Katharina* was surrounded by the various craft, some three abreast. The police, augmented by the heftiest of the troop, went on board, and under Courtney Mills's directions the great round-up proceeded.

Twenty-five more or less stupefied men emerged from the forepeak and, handcuffed, were passed down into the boats.

" Where's Apulgrab, Dick?" asked Courtney Mills.

" In his cabin, sir, I'll show you."

Unlocking the door, the patrol leader stood aside for the Secret Service officer to enter. Then he, too, followed, eager to witness the arrest of the arch-criminal.

The cabin was empty.

Lying on the deck and torn to shreds were the remains of the table-napkins by which his ankles and wrists had been lashed. A broken blood-stained tumbler too!

But of the much-wanted criminal there was no sign.

CHAPTER XXIII

Five Fathoms Down

Without a word, Courtney Mills made a rapid examination of the cabin, testing the panelling, trying the still firmly-fastened skylight and gauging the width of the scuttles, each of which was too small to allow even a child to squeeze through. He went down on his hands and knees and went over the deck planking for signs of a recently prised-up board and even tugged at the swing-table which, strongly clamped down, resisted all his efforts to move it.

Meanwhile Dick was standing there and blaming himself for not having made a sound job of it. He had, as he thought, secured his man in a most scientific way, lashing his arms behind his back with a "double rack seizing" out of which it was impossible for the hands to be slipped.

"Our bird's flown—for a while, Dick," remarked the Secret Service man as he rose to his feet and rubbed his bare knees. His civilian suit had been hopelessly ruined following his knock-out by the lorry-crew and once again, though readily, he had had to don his borrowed S.M.'s uniform.

"Yes, sir; my fault——"

Courtney Mills held up his hand.

"Don't say that! You secured him all shipshape and Bristol fashion, Dick; but that didn't prevent him smashing a tumbler, wedging it between the bars of this grate and then sawing through the bonds. He's cut himself in the process, you'll observe; but it's curious that there is no trail of bloodstains to mark his getaway."

"But how could he have got out. I locked him in."

"And he had a duplicate key."

"That won't do, sir. I left the key in the lock. You'll remember it was there when I went to open the door."

"So it was," admitted Mills. "My error! But without a doubt he's got away and probably mixed with the crew. Do you know exactly how many there are?"

"Hadn't a chance to count them, sir."

"I suppose not. We'll make a thorough search of the yacht."

The search revealed no signs of the missing Apulgrab.

"Jumped overboard, most likely, to avoid arrest," suggested Mr. Dangerfield. "Well, what now, Mills?"

"I'll send the prisoners ashore and remain here with some of the police and a stiffening of your Sea Scouts, if you don't mind. At high tide we'll borrow your motor-launch and tow her in. Sea's smooth and there's wind, so it should be an easy job. What's that, Dick?"

"You haven't recovered the KI, sir!"

"No, nor am I likely to," rejoined Courtney Mills regretfully.

"And so you've missed a thundering good chance for promotion, sir?"

"Steady on, Dick, steady!" exclaimed his S.M.

But for once at least, Dick under a rebuke grinned delightedly.

"May we send ashore for the diving-dress, sir?" he asked.

"Whatever for?" asked the S.M. and the Secret Service man simultaneously.

"Because the yacht happens to be anchored over the Calf Bank where the smugglers' motor-boat sank alongside as they were taking my sister and me to the yacht. The metal case was in the boat; I put it there."

"What? You put it there?" exclaimed Courtney. "But wouldn't it tumble out and be washed away by the current when the boat capsized?"

"It would have floated if she had capsized," replied Dick. "I know, because I found that it did when we were in the ditch after Joyce's 'plane sank. But I don't think the motor-boat turned over. She had too much weight in her for that; and besides I pushed the case through a crack in the bottom boards. Now I think of it, that was the cause of the boat smashing her bows in—the case jammed and prevented the reverse lever working properly."

"Then we'll have the diving-dress brought off the yacht," decided Mr. Dangerfield.

"On conditions, sir!" said Dick eagerly.

"What conditions, boy?"

"That I'm the first down, sir; it's quite an easy business. Only five fathoms, a sandy bottom and slack water for another hour or more."

"Right, then!" decided the S.M.

The motor-launch, manned by the Otters under the command of Second Jimmy Cotton, was dispatched to fetch the diving-dress together with the air-pump and other apparatus—and the Otters wasted no time about it!

Meanwhile Dick discussed his plan of action with his S.M. They agreed that if Dick located the wrecked motor-boat he would not attempt to recover the metal case. All he would do would be to signal for two additional weighted ropes to be lowered. These he would make fast bow and stern. Then he would come to the surface, after which the boat would be hauled up till her gunwales were awash between two of the largest of the Sea Scouts' craft.

"Then take great care not to get you air-tube or your life-line foul of the rope," cautioned Mr. Dangerfield.

"I'll look out for that, sir," replied Dick confidently.

The motor-boat returned with the necessary gear and with Joyce in the stern-sheets.

"I simply had to come to see the fun, Dick," she explained. "And I didn't forget to telegraph home to say we were all right."

"I'd clean forgotten all about wiring," admitted her brother. "But perhaps it's too early for me to say that," he added to himself, for he was running another risk before he would be able to hand the KI to Courtney Mills.

It was not considered safe for Dick to make the descent from the *Katharina*. Riding to a single anchor, the yacht was liable to sheer and swing through a wide radius, with the result that had the patrol leader been at the bottom he would have been dragged across the bed of the bay and probably would have got his life-line foul of the *Katharina's* cable.

To guard against this risk, the largest pulling boat was manned fore and aft about fifty yards from the yacht.

Dick was then assisted into his cumbersome diving-dress. The air-pump was tested and the connexions to the helmet made.

Meanwhile, a shot-rope had been lowered to serve both as a means of descent and as a guide when the diver was pursuing his quest; but to assist the first part of his submergence a short iron ladder, about six feet in length, was securely clamped to the gunwale of the boat.

While his assistants took up the strain on the patrol leader's life-line—for a slip at this part of the proceedings would have been fatal—others helped him over the gunwale.

Step by step he descended until the level of the water rose to his chest. Then the glass front of his helmet was fitted and screwed hard home. From that moment he was dependent upon the air-pump for his ability to breathe. For purposes of communication, apart from the recognized signals given by tugging at his life-line, he was equipped with a slate and pencil which could be sent up and down by means of a thin line.

A sharp tap on the domed top of the helmet warned Dick that all was ready.

He took two more steps and found that his feet, hitherto hampered by the weight of the encasing soles but now feeling almost as light as if he were wearing tennis shoes, were clear of the lowermost rung.

The buzzing in his ears had ceased. That was yet another preliminary inconvenience that had disappeared.

Grasping the shot-rope, he let himself go, merely checking his gradual descent by an increased pressure of his fingers.

At five fathoms his feet touched bottom. He actually bounced! Movement, though slow on account of the resistance of the water, was by no means difficult. Neither was he greatly hampered by the subdued, pale green light. He could see objects distinctly at ten feet and more or less indistinctly up to about twice that distance.

Holding the light rope known as the " distance-line ", he set off, moving steadily over the ground. At every step clouds of displaced sand rose like miniature jets of steam. Crabs scuttled before his advance. Fishes darted to and fro, some of the smaller fry boldly hovering round his helmet.

Either his bearings were accurate or else good luck was his, for hardly had he taken half a dozen paces when he noticed a dark object slightly on his left. As he drew nearer it took shape.

It was a boat lying on her keel with a slight list. But was it the smugglers' motor-boat? Surely this huge hull couldn't be! It must be that of some forgotten wreck.

Then he remembered the magnifying effect of water.

A few more steps—he was nearly at the limit of his distance line by now—and he was no longer in doubt.

Quickly Dick wrote: " Located. Send ropes down ", and signalled for the slate to be drawn up to the surface.

While he was waiting, he groped for a suitable object to which to make the after rope fast. He soon found a massive ring-bolt fixed to the inner side of the transom.

Down came the first rope, the sinker of which looked as large as a football. In about a minute the patrol leader had rove the rope and had made it secure by means of a fisherman's bend.

Then, going the length of the boat, he caught the second rope, which he made fast in similar fashion.

" The whole job is as simple as shelling peas," he thought, as he prepared to retrace his way to the shot-rope.

But as he straightened himself after making the bend fast he was aware of a dark greeny object perfectly motionless and about ten feet from him. At first sight it looked like an enormous misshapen statue—one of Epstein's monstrosities in stone consigned to a watery grave at the bottom of Camlytch Bay by some well-meaning iconoclast.

He was absolutely certain that object hadn't been there when he was making his way towards the boat.

In spite of the heat of his diving-dress—already his red stocking cap was moist with perspiration—he felt cold shudders.

Whatever it was, the Thing was moving—moving towards him. It was no optical illusion but a solid fact, and a horrible one at that.

It moved ponderously, with slow and measured tread.

Dick stopped dead. So did the Thing.

The patrol leader could now see it move distinctly. It had diminished somewhat in size and was taking more definite form. It was that of a diver!

Then Dick thought he had "tumbled to it". By some strange freak of refraction and reflection he was looking at a distorted image of himself!

But no!

He was still standing motionless when the figure advanced a couple of paces and stopped again.

It *was* a diver!

More, the man was wearing what was known as a self-contained diving-dress, unimpeded by life-line, air-tube or other means of attachment.

There was something sinister, menacing, in that silent, mysterious invader of the depths.

For Dick there was no retreat beyond the limits of his distance line, and the other diver was standing between him and his shot-rope.

Slowly the man's hand went to his belt. From a sheath he drew a knife, the blade of which gleamed formidably in the pale green light.

Then Dick realized that he was in a very tight corner. The attitude of the man left no doubt in the Sea Scout's mind. It looked like being a fight that must end either in victory or death for one, perhaps death for both!

CHAPTER XXIV

The Arch-villain's Last Throw

It was a very subdued Michael Apulgrab who recovered his senses about twenty minutes after Dick had given him the knock-out. Lying on the deck of his cabin, bound hand and foot, he realized that his far-flung schemes had collapsed like a pack of cards.

He was a prisoner, the *Katharina* was in the possession of—who? Beyond the fact that the Sea Scout had floored him he knew nothing except that his crew weren't able to come to his assistance. Naturally he jumped to the conclusion that the vessel had been boarded and captured by a strong party; although he could find no satisfactory explanation of how the operation had been conducted so noiselessly. His latest arms-running venture was a disastrous failure, while—and this was the culminating failure—he had not after all his pains been able to lay his hands upon the priceless KI.

He was aware that the yacht was still under way, but apart from the noises set up by the engines and the thud of the waves against the hull there was a strange silence. That baffled him still more. Had his crew mutinied—why should they? he had always paid them handsomely—and released that stubborn young cub who, if he hadn't actually defied him had baulked him in every attempt to get information. And then this youth had knocked him out—Michael Apulgrab at whose voice full-grown men had trembled!

Apulgrab was essentially a man of action. He was not going to lie there bound and helpless. Raising his head, he found that his ankles were bound with strips of linen—his tablecloth, confound it!—that he had bought and paid for!

Then he caught sight of the capsized siphon and close to it the jagged base of a broken tumbler.

It did not take him long to wedge the glass between the bars of the brass-framed grate, even though he had to work with his hands lashed behind his back. He congratulated himself upon the fact that it was August and that there was no fire in the grate.

Then, entirely by sense of touch, he began to saw the bonds on his wrists against the sharp edge of the broken tumbler. At intervals he stopped to examine part of the result of his efforts—shreds of linen littering the hearth-rug. Then there was blood on the fragments. He had cut himself without being aware of it. He must be more careful—a severed vein or, worse still, an artery, would destroy all his efforts and perhaps himself as well!

In twenty minutes his hands were free. Pausing only to restore circulation to his benumbed fingers —that confounded Sea Scout hadn't meant those knots to slip!—he cast off the linen strips that were lashed round his ankles.

He was free—free up to a certain point, but still behind a locked door.

He drew his automatic—if only he had been a few seconds earlier when that youth broke in upon him!—and examined it carefully. One shot, or two at the most would shatter the lock. And then? Could he with but three cartridges left in the magazine hope to overcome perhaps a dozen or more of the men now in possession of the yacht?

Apulgrab abhorred the use of firearms unless he could make a clean job of it and stand a ninety-nine per cent chance of getting away with it. The possibility of failure, ending in the condemned cell, was too much for him. He replaced the weapon in his hip-pocket.

There remained a secret bolt-hole—one of which even the skipper of the yacht was unaware.

Grasping one end of the table, Apulgrab swung it back by means of a cleverly concealed pair of hinges. Part of the deck swung back with it, revealing a dark cavity about four feet in length and thirty inches in width. Just inside could be seen the top of an iron ladder.

Groping, he found a switch. One click and the space below was flooded in light.

Descending, Apulgrab replaced the swinging cover. As it dropped into position two threaded bolts entered corresponding holes in the supporting deck-beams. On these he threaded the butterfly-nuts, which had been lying in a box ready for such an emergency, and screwed them home hard.

In the now vacant cabin the table was secured as firm as a rock.

The compartment in which Apulgrab now found himself was built between two bulkheads below the water-line and only a few feet apart. Anyone making a search below would be unable to discover that there were double bulkheads unless careful measurements were taken.

Here the former owner of the *Katharina* could remain for quite a long time without risk of discovery. There were emergency rations sufficient to last him a week. No doubt the captured yacht would be taken alongside some quay and left in charge of a watchman—he knew what some watchmen were! It would be a simple business to emerge from his place of concealment and walk ashore.

In this secret hiding-place Apulgrab could hear fairly distinctly what was going on on deck. Originally, when the *Katharina* was employed on marine biological research, there had been a voice-tube communicating with the bridge and chart-room. The pipe had been cut through flush with the woodwork in the wake of the bridge and still served as a means of conducting sound and for purposes of ventilation.

He could also hear, though less distinctly, voices alongside after he had awakened from a few hours' sleep.

He listened and discovered, amongst other information, that the *Katharina* was anchored over the Calf Bank and therefore about a mile from the Anglesey shore. What was more interesting, he overheard the diving party making plans for the salvage of the sunken motor-boat and the recovery of the metal case containing the KI.

That, then, was the secret which that stubborn young mule of a Sea Scout had refused to reveal. The precious case—upon which a Canadian millionaire had advanced a million dollars to prove that it was a bona-fide offer—was lying under the bottom boards of the boat that a few hours earlier he had seen smashing her bows in against the *Katharina's* side!

It did not take Apulgrab long to decide upon his new plan of action. He would don one of the self-contained diving-dresses, leave the yacht by means of the air-lock, find the case and then make for the shore. All he wanted was a compass to give him the general direction and one he carried on his watch-chain. It was a very small one and in all probability not watertight, but the magnetic needle could be trusted to guide him shorewards.

He examined the containers containing the supply of air. All seemed to be charged up and in good order.

Next came the difficult task of donning unassisted one of the cumbersome diving-suits. These hadn't been used or even tested for some months—not since that little affair in an East African river when, single-handed, he had scuttled a dhow carrying arms for one of his competitors in this unlawful and unholy traffic.

He would have to run the risk of the diving-dress not being watertight.

Perspiring profusely, he managed to draw on the stiff canvas dress. Then, after a strenuous effort he succeeded in lacing the lead-soled boots. Next the helmet, for until that was in position he could not attach the weight to his chest and back or strap on the air-container. The hardest part was to twist the helmet into its metal seating so as to ensure a water-tight joint.

Then, with the front of the headdress still open, he connected the tube that admitted air into the helmet, secured the leaden weights and finally closed the metal-rimmed glass that had the result of almost hermetically sealing him from the outside world. Only his bare hands were in direct contact with his surroundings.

The air supply was satisfactory. Until he entered the water he had no means of telling whether the dress was proof against loss of air. If it were not, the discovery would have to be made before he dropped from the aperture in the yacht's side. Once he parted company with the hull he would be unable to regain it.

He then entered the air-lock and closed the door; but before operating the valves that admitted the water he paused.

Why not checkmate those who had seized the *Katharina* by leaving the door open and thus allowing the water to fill not only the air-lock but the hull of the yacht as well? Better to scuttle the yacht than to let her fall into the hands of the representatives of the law, whoever they might be!

He dismissed the suggestion from his mind—not on account of a possible loss of life to the present crew, but from fear of his own personal safety. The inrush of water might find its way through the open door, holding him there until the collapse of the bulkheads under the enormous pressure would make an end of him.

Slowly he turned the valve. A jet of water spurted in. Gradually the level rose. He could feel the pressure increasing against the canvas legs of his diving-dress. He flexed his toes. *They* were not in water. That told him that so far the suit was sound.

Higher and higher rose the now gently swirling water, until it flowed above his helmet.

Still he must wait. Until the pressure was almost equal on both sides of the metal door in the yacht's side no human being could succeed in opening it.

He was in utter darkness. If by any chance the clips securing the door were incapable of being moved through rust or other causes he was doomed. Although he could flood the air-lock the task of emptying it by means of pumps could only be performed by others from the water-tight compartment that he had so recently left.

Waiting until the gurgling sounds had ceased—and how plainly they could be heard against the metal globe that encased his head!—Apulgrab tugged at the first metal clip. It gave, after a strong effort on his part. The other was more difficult. He heaved at it almost to the point of breaking off the metal—in which case his fate would have been sealed. At length it yielded.

A strong push and the slightly curved door swung back, revealing a blur of greenish light. It was the sea as seen at a depth of only twelve feet below the surface. The floor of the Calf Bank was some eighteen or twenty feet below.

Now without hesitation, Apulgrab let himself drop. He had no fear of descending violently. Actually the jar when his leaden-soled boots touched the bed of hard sand was no more than if he had jumped down from a stool.

Consulting his compass, which he had strapped to his wrist—for he already knew from outside evidence on which side of the yacht the diving-party was working—he set out with short slow steps.

To his relief, progress was relatively easy. It was slack water and consequently there was no fierce current to contend with.

He was in no immediate hurry. Again and again he stopped to look right and left in the hope of finding evidence of the diver belonging to the salvage party. There would be ropes hanging almost vertically; trailing air-tube and life-line; a guess or distance line and, more than anything, the sight of the sunken motor-boat.

What surprising luck it would be if he could locate the boat, recover the case and make his way to the shore before his rival had time to descend.

Again he stopped.

He had nearly stumbled over a rope—one that by its appearance was almost new, therefore it could not have lain there very long.

Turning to his left, Apulgrab began to follow the hempen clue until he discovered that it was attached to the sinker of a shot-rope.

So he had been forestalled; but had the submarine searcher already discovered the boat?

As he stood pondering whether he should follow the distance rope in the other direction he became aware of the grotesquely distorted figure of a diver approaching him.

Almost at the same moment the other man stopped too.

Apulgrab fancied he saw the glint of a small metal object in the diver's hand. It was a delusion, but in his present state of mind he was at the mercy of his imagination.

He was too late. The rival diver had already secured the secret of the KI.

Then the master-criminal saw red. His one and only chance was to resort to killing, gain possession of the coveted prize and then make for the shore before those on the surface were aware of the fate that had overtaken his victim.

He knew that there was no escape for the other diver unless he was prompt to give the signal to be brought to the surface. The other diver could only retreat to the extreme length of his air-tube, and Apulgrab was between him and the shot-rope.

He drew his knife. It required only one thrust through the other's rubber and canvas dress—it did not even matter if the blade inflicted a wound or not—and the other diver's fate was sealed.

CHAPTER XXV

The Secret Revealed

Poised like a wrestler, Dick Hargreaves awaited the onslaught. Up went Apulgrab's arm. He struck instead of thrusting and that was the patrol leader's salvation.

Momentarily forgetting the resistance of the water, Apulgrab was a trifle too slow. The point missed the patrol leader's shoulder by a bare inch.

Before the would-be murderer could recover his balance Dick grasped his wrist.

They closed and were soon in a desperate embrace, Apulgrab vainly endeavouring to slash at anything—Dick's dress, his air-tube or even at the glass front of his helmet—while the Sea Scout endeavoured to twist his antagonist's wrist and prevent, the point of the blade inflicting the one and only stroke necessary to decide the issue.

As they fought they leapt six or seven feet from the sea-bed, churning up the sand until the water was so opaque that it was only by the sense of touch that the combat was maintained.

Once, their helmets met with such a thud that Dick thought the glass had been cracked, so loud was the sound, intensified by his hollow copper head-dress.

Then Apulgrab lashed out with one of the lead-weighted boots. Dick promptly retaliated with more success, for he felt his foe wilt under the blow.

Without relaxing his grip on his rival's wrist, the patrol leader followed up the advantage by dragging his man forward. Apulgrab stumbled and fell, prevented from measuring his length upon the sand by Dick's hold.

It was a fight, both literally and figuratively, with the gloves off, in which Apulgrab had not scrupled to employ any despicable trick to decide the issue. And now neither did Dick Hargreaves.

He knelt on his antagonist's back, seized his left wrist as it frantically pawed the water, drew both arms behind his back and pounded with his boots upon Apulgrab's air-container.

Even as he did so he was conscious of an abnormal distention of his own diving-dress.

Judging by the unusual commotion on the surface that something was amiss, Mr. Dangerfield had given orders for Dick to be " blown to the surface "—an operation performed by pumping such quantities of air into his dress that in spite of the relieving valves—in the circumstances Dick could not have operated them—the now distended diving-dress had more buoyancy than the weight of his boots and the lead slabs in his corselet.

Slowly yet surely, Dick found himself rising. Not for an instant did his grip on his rival's wrists relax. While consciousness remained Apulgrab was dangerous with the knife still in his grasp. Apart from that, the patrol leader, now sure of his man, was determined to bring him with him to the surface.

Normally, a diver blown to the surface arrives spread-eagled and face uppermost; but to the intense surprise of his fellow Sea Scouts the patrol leader's back and legs arrived first in a turmoil of air-bubbles and foam.

Jimmy Cotton afterwards remarked that his chum looked like a marine example of a well-known motor tyre manufacturer's advertisement!

"Look out!" shouted the Second. "Something's got hold of him—looks like a porpoise!"

"It's another diver!" declared Ginger Smith. "Don't let him go! Get a boathook!"

But Dick hadn't the slightest intention of relaxing his grip and allowing his antagonist to drop to the sea-bed—at least while that knife was a source of potential danger. So in the end a couple of ropes were bent to Apulgrab's legs and half a dozen hefty Sea Scouts began to haul.

"Steady!" ordered the S.M. sharply. "Avast there!"

The warning was a timely one, for the heavily-built cutter's gunwale was nearly awash. Had she dipped the consequences would have been fatal to the Otters' patrol leader and to the man he was holding in such a determined grip.

Equally fortunate was it that Matterson and Blacklock, who were working the air-pumps, did not allow their excitement to interfere with the all-important work of supplying their patrol leader with air.

Another boat, manned by the Kestrels, was manœuvred near to the diving-boat but about six feet from it. More ropes were brought into action, while oars, hastily lashed to the gunwales of both boats, checked any further tendency on the part of the cutter to dip.

Then like a pair of stranded sea-lions, Dick and his adversary were hauled on board.

Courtney Mills wrenched the knife out of the other diver's hand, and then only did the now exhausted patrol leader relinquish his grip.

The two rivals were separated, and while Mr. Dangerfield removed the front of Dick's helmet and allowed him to gulp in deep breaths of ozone-laden air, the Secret Service man performed a like service for the now unconscious man in the self-contained diving-dress.

" Dick all right?" he inquired of the S.M.

" Yes," replied Mr. Dangerfield. " I suppose that's Apulgrab?"

" That name's good enough for the present," rejoined Courtney Mills. " He's wanted under other tallies for half a dozen offences. I've got him right enough this time, thanks to your Sea Scouts!"

Divested of their cumbersome diving-dresses, Dick and his still unconscious antagonist were taken on board the *Katharina*.

It was not long before the patrol leader was able to take a renewed interest in the operations, for the task he had undertaken was still unfinished—that of the salving of the smugglers' motor-boat.

The ropes that Dick had previously secured to the bow and stern were taken over the transoms of the two pulling boats. Half a dozen Sea Scouts in each tailed on and commenced to heave and in about a minute the gunwales of the sunken craft were awash.

It was the patrol leader of the Otters to whom fell the task of recovering the metal case.

Jumping aboard and groping at arm's length in the water he wrenched up the floor boards on one side of the reverse gear.

There, still jammed between the shaft and one of the sliding rods, was the secret of the KI.

And it was Dick Hargreaves who handed the metal case into the keeping of Courtney Mills.

. . . .

Naturally the finding of the case containing the Canadian millionaire's secret, and the complete rounding up of Apulgrab's gang, caused a tremendous sensation not only throughout the United Kingdom but throughout the civilized world. Press representatives of a dozen different nationalities descended like a swarm of locusts upon Haunted Harbour. The Sea Scouts' camp, as such, had practically ceased to exist. Every member of the troop was regarded as lawful prey by the enterprising reporters and press photographers, whose disappointment was great when they discovered that Patrol Leader Dick Hargreaves had disappeared!

Courtney Mills had left for London soon after he landed from the captured *Katharina*, taking with him the object the recovery of which assured his promotion.

He made the journey by a Scotland Yard car, accompanied by a colleague and two Sea Scouts. Another car, filled with Yard men, followed, keeping the first in sight throughout the entire journey. Even though Apulgrab's gang were safely jailed Scotland Yard was taking no chances!

One of the Sea Scouts was Patrol Leader Dick Hargreaves; the other—he had been given the choice of his companion—was Jimmy Cotton, and he meant that Jimmy should have a thundering good time in Town.

Arrangements had been made for the metal case to be opened at a full meeting of the Cabinet at Downing Street, a meeting to which Dick was invited, together with Courtney Mills and certain high officials from New Scotland Yard.

Those invited to attend were bidden to wait in an anteroom until the members of the Cabinet were ready to receive them.

Already these representatives of his Majesty's Government were sitting at a long table, the Prime Minister at the head. In front of him on the green cloth rested the case containing the mysterious KI—the device or formula or what-not to end war. If the Canadian millionaire, Ambrose Lartnec, could fulfil his pledges—apart from having backed them to the extent of a million dollars—he would be acclaimed the greatest benefactor the twentieth century had known, and one whose greatness would go down to the ages.

The hermetically sealed metal case had undergone a slight change in appearance since Dick had handed it over to Courtney Mills. A small medallion had been removed, revealing a keyhole. The key had been sent to London from Montreal several days previously, accompanying Ambrose Lartnec's cheque for a cool million dollars. It now reposed by the side of the case, awaiting the minute when the Prime Minister would use it to reveal the secret that had given rise to such tremendous speculation and conjecture.

"I suppose it isn't a colossal hoax," remarked one of the ministers to his next-door neighbour. "Another kind of stunt like that of Johanna Southcote's box?"

The individual addressed, who had never heard of the eighteenth century so-called prophetess, but would not admit his ignorance, shook his head.

"I hardly think so," he replied. "Let me think; did I ever meet the lady?"

"It's quite possible you may some day," rejoined the other enigmatically.

The Prime Minister rapped the table and ordered that those invited to witness the opening of the box be admitted.

There was dead silence, broken at length by the click of the key in the lock.

Inside the case were two folded objects—one a typewritten document, the other a small roll of green silk.

Adjusting his glasses and unfolding the paper, the Prime Minister cleared his throat.

"This is what Mr. Ambrose Lartnec writes," he began: "'The prevention and abolition of war depends not upon the Government of one or even of several nations, but upon the rising generation of the whole world. Mutual understanding and personal contact between the youth of all nations can alone bring about this wholly desirable result. Amongst the organizations that already exist for the laudable purpose, allow me to signal out one—the one whose emblem I enclose.' "

Slowly the Prime Minister unfolded the small roll of silk.

It was a green flag bearing a *fleur de lys* and the motto: " BE PREPARED!"

GIRLS COLLE